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THE

BRAMLEIGHS OF BISHOP'S FOLLY.

BY

CHARLES LEVER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL II.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1868.

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THE

BRAMLEIGHS OF BISHOP'S FOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE LIBRARY AT CASTELLO.

When L'Estrange and his sister arrived at Castello on the morning after the scene of our last chapter, it was to discover that the family had gone off early to visit the mine of Lisconnor, where they were to dine, and not return till late in the evening.

Colonel Bramleigh alone remained behind: a number of important letters which had come by that morning's post detained him; but he had pledged himself to follow the party, and join them at dinner, if he could finish his correspondence in time.

George and Julia turned away from the door, and were slowly retracing their road homeward, when

a servant came running after them to say that Colonel Bramleigh begged Mr. L'Estrange would come back for a moment; that he had something of consequence to say to him.

"I'll stroll about the shrubberies, George, till you join me," said Julia. "Who knows it may not be a farewell look I may be taking of these dear old scenes." George nodded, half mournfully, and followed the servant towards the library.

In his ordinary and every-day look, no man ever seemed a more perfect representative of worldly success and prosperity than Colonel Bramleigh. He was personally what would be called handsome, had a high bold forehead, and large grey eyes, well set and shaded by strong full eyebrows, so regular in outline and so correctly defined as to give a half suspicion that art had been called to the assistance of nature. He was ruddy and fresh-looking, with an erect carriage, and that air of general confidence that seemed to declare he knew himself to be a favourite of fortune and gloried in the distinction.

"I can do scores of things others must not venture upon," was a common saying of his. "I can trust to my luck," was almost a maxim with

him. And in reality, if the boast was somewhat vainglorious, it was not without foundation; a marvellous, almost unerring, success attended him through life. Enterprises that were menaced with ruin and bankruptcy would rally from the hour that he joined them, and schemes of fortune that men deemed half desperate would, under his guidance, grow into safe and profitable speculations. Others might equal him in intelligence, in skill, in ready resource and sudden expedient, but he had not one to rival him in luck. It is strange enough that the hard business mind, the men of realism *par excellence*, can recognize such a thing as fortune; but so it is, there are none so prone to believe in this quality as the people of finance. The spirit of the gambler is, in fact, the spirit of commercial enterprise, and the "odds" are as carefully calculated in the counting-house as in the betting-ring. Seen as he came into the breakfast-room of a morning, with the fresh flush of exercise on his cheek, or as he appeared in the drawing-room before dinner, with that air of ease and enjoyment that marked all his courtesy, one would have said, "There is one certainly with whom the world goes well." There were caustic,

invidious people, who hinted that Bramleigh deserved but little credit for that happy equanimity and that buoyant spirit which sustained him; they said, "He has never had a reverse, wait till he be tried:" and the world had waited and waited, and to all seeming the eventful hour had not come, for there he was, a little balder perhaps, a stray grey hair in his whiskers, and somewhat portlier in his presence, but, on the whole, pretty much what men had known him to be for fifteen or twenty years back.

Upon none did the well-to-do, blooming, and prosperous rich man produce a more powerful impression than on the young curate, who, young, vigorous, handsome as he was, could yet never sufficiently emerge from the res angustæ domi to feel the ease and confidence that come of affluence.

What a shock was it then to L'Estrange, as he entered the library, to see the man whom he had ever beheld as the type of all that was happy and healthful and prosperous, haggard and careworn, his hand tremulous, and his manner abrupt and uncertain, with a certain furtive dread at moments, followed by outbursts of passionate defiance, as

though he were addressing himself to others besides him who was then before him.

Though on terms of cordial intimacy with the curate, and always accustomed to call him by his name, he received him as he entered the room with a cold and formal politeness, apologized for having taken the liberty to send after and recall him, and ceremoniously requested him to be seated.

"We were sorry you and Miss L'Estrange could not join the picnic to-day," said Bramleigh; "though to be sure it is scarcely the season yet for such diversions."

L'Estrange felt the awkwardness of saying that they had not been invited, and muttered something not very intelligible about the uncertainty of the weather.

"I meant to have gone over myself," said Bramleigh, hurriedly; "but all these," and he swept his hand as he spoke through a mass of letters on the table, "all these have come since morning, and I am not half through them yet. What's that the moralist says about calling no man happy till he dies? I often think one cannot speculate upon a pleasant day till after the post-hour."

"I know very little of either the pains or pleasures of the letter-bag. I have almost no correspondence."

"How I envy you!" cried he, fervently.

"I don't imagine that mine is a lot many would be found to envy," said L'Estrange, with a gentle smile.

"The old story, of course. 'Quî fit, Mæcenas, ut Nemo,'—I forget my Horace,—'ut Nemo;' how does it go?"

"Yes, sir. But I never said I was discontented with my lot in life. I only remarked that I didn't think that others would envy it."

"I have it,—I have it," continued Bramleigh, following out his own train of thought; "I have it. 'Ut Nemo, quam sibi sortem sit contentus.' It's a matter of thirty odd years since I saw that passage, L'Estrange, and I can't imagine what could have brought it so forcibly before me to-day."

"Certainly it could not have been any application to yourself," said the curate, politely.

"How do you mean, sir?" cried Bramleigh, almost fiercely. "How do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that few men have less cause for discontent with fortune?"

"How can *you*,—how can any man, presume to say that of another!" said Bramleigh, in a loud and defiant tone, as he arose and paced the room. "Who can tell what passes in his neighbour's house, still less in his heart or his head? What do I know, as I listen to your discourse on a Sunday, of the terrible conflict of doubts that have beset you during the week,—heresies that have swarmed around you like the vipers and hideous reptiles that gathered around St. Anthony, and that, banished in one shape, came back in another? How do I know what compromises you may have made with your conscience before you come to utter to me your eternal truths; and how you may have said, 'If he can believe all this, so much the better for him,'—eh?"

He turned fiercely round, as if to demand an answer, and the curate modestly said, "I hope it is not so that men preach the gospel."

"And yet many must preach in that fashion," said Bramleigh, with a deep but subdued earnestness. "I take it that no man's convictions are without a flaw somewhere, and it is not by parading that flaw he will make converts."

L'Estrange did not feel disposed to follow him into this thesis, and sat silent and motionless.

"I suppose," muttered Bramleigh, as he folded his arms and walked the room with slow steps, "it's all expediency,—all! We do the best we can, and hope it may be enough. You are a good man, L'Estrange——"

"Far from it, sir. I feel, and feel very bitterly too, my own unworthiness," said the curate, with an intense sincerity of voice.

"I think you so far good that you are not worldly. You would not do a mean thing, an ignoble, a dishonest thing; you wouldn't take what was not your own, nor defraud another of what was his,—would you?"

"Perhaps not; I hope not."

"And yet that is saying a great deal. I may have my doubts whether that penknife be mine or not. Some one may come to-morrow or next day to claim it as his, and describe it, heaven knows how rightly or wrongly. No matter, he'll say he owns it. Would you, sir,—I ask you now simply as a Christian man, I am not speaking to a casuist or a lawyer,—would you, sir, at once, just as a

measure of peace to your own conscience, say, 'Let him take it,' rather than burden your heart with a discussion for which you had no temper nor taste? That's the question I'd like to ask you. Can you answer it? I see you cannot," cried he, rapidly. "I see at once how you want to go off into a thousand subtleties, and instead of resolving my one doubt, surround me with a legion of others."

"If I know anything about myself I'm not much of a casuist; I haven't the brains for it," said L'Estrange, with a sad smile.

"Ay, there it is. That's the humility of Satan's own making; that's the humility that exclaims, 'I'm only honest. I'm no genius. Heaven has not made me great or gifted. I'm simply a poor creature, right-minded and pure-hearted.' As if there was anything,—as if there could be anything so exalted as this same purity."

"But I never said that; I never presumed to say so," said the other, modestly.

"And if you rail against riches, and tell me that wealth is a snare and a pitfall, what do you mean by telling me that my reverse of fortune is a chastisement? Why, sir, by your own theory it ought to

be a blessing, a positive blessing; so that if I were turned out of this princely house to-morrow, branded as a pretender and an impostor, I should go forth better,—not only better, but happier. Ay, that's the point; happier than I ever was as the lord of these broad acres!" As he spoke he tore his cravat from his throat, as though it were strangling him by its pressure, and now walked the room, carrying the neckcloth in his hand, while the veins in his throat stood out full and swollen like a tangled cordage.

L'Estrange was so much frightened by the wild voice and wilder gesture of the man, that he could not utter a word in reply.

Bramleigh now came over, and leaning his hand on the other's shoulder, in a tone of kind and gentle meaning, said,—

"It is not your fault, my dear friend, that you are illogical and unreasonable. You are obliged to defend a thesis you do not understand, by arguments you cannot measure. The armoury of the Church has not a weapon that has not figured in the middle ages; and what are you to do with halberds and cross-bows in a time of rifles and revolvers! If a man, like myself, burdened with a

heavy weight on his heart, had gone to his confessor in olden times, he would probably have heard, if not words of comfort, something to enlighten, to instruct, and to guide him. Now what can you give me? tell me that? I want to hear by what subtleties the Church can reconcile me not to do what I ought to do, and yet not quarrel with my own conscience. Can you help me to that?"

L'Estrange shook his head in dissent.

"I suppose it is out of some such troubles as mine that men come to change their religion." He paused; and then bursting into a laugh, said,—"You hear that the other bank deals more liberally—asks a smaller commission, and gives you a handsomer interest—and you accordingly transfer your account. I believe that's the whole of it."

"I will not say you have stated the case fairly," said L'Estrange; but so faintly as to show that he was far from eager to continue the discussion, and he arose to take his leave.

"You are going already? and I have not spoken to you one word about—what was it? Can you remember what it was? Something that related personally to yourself."

"Perhaps I can guess, sir. It was the mine at Lisconnor, probably? You were kind enough the other day to arrange my securing some shares in the undertaking. Since that, however, I have heard a piece of news which may affect my whole future career. There has been some report made by the Commissioner about the parish."

"That's it, that's it. They're going to send you off, L'Estrange. They're going to draft you to a cathedral, and make a prebendary of you. You are to be on the staff of an archbishop: a sort of Christian unattached. Do you like the prospect?"

"Not at all, sir. To begin, I am a very poor man, and could ill bear the cost of life this might entail."

"Your sister would probably be pleased with the change; a gayer place, more life, more movement."

"I suspect my sister reconciles herself to dulness even better than myself."

"Girls do that occasionally; patience is a female virtue."

There was a slight pause; and now L'Estrange, drawing a long breath as if preparing himself for a great effort, said,—

"It was to speak to you, sir, about that very matter, and to ask your assistance, that I came up here this day."

"I wish I were a bishop, for your sake, my dear friend."

"I know well, sir, I can count upon your kind interest in me, and I believe that an opportunity now offers——"

"What is it? where is it?"

"At Rome, sir; or rather near Rome, a place called Albano. They want a chaplain there."

"But you're not a Catholic priest, L'Estrange."

"No, sir. It is an English community that wants a parson."

"I see; and you think this would suit you?"

"There are some great attractions about it; the country, the climate, and the sort of life, all have a certain fascination for me, and Julia is most eager about it."

"The young lady has ambition," muttered Bramleigh to himself. "But what can *I* do, L'Estrange? I don't own a rood of land at Albano. I haven't a villa—not even a fig-tree there. I could subscribe to the church fund, if there be such a

thing; I could qualify for the franchise, and give you a vote, if that would be of service."

"You could do better, sir. You could give me a letter to Lady Augusta, whose influence, I believe, is all powerful."

For a moment Bramleigh stared at him fixedly, and then sinking slowly into a chair, he leaned his head on his hand, and seemed lost in thought. The name of Lady Augusta had brought up before him a long train of events and possible consequences, which soon led him far away from the parson and all his cares. From her debts, her extravagances, her change of religion, and her suggestion of separation, he went back to his marriage with her, and even to his first meeting. Strange chain of disasters from beginning to end. A bad investment in every way. It paid nothing. It led to nothing.

"I hope, sir," said L'Estrange, as he gazed at the strange expression of preoccupation in the other's face—"I hope, sir, I have not been indiscreet in my request?"

"What *was* your request?" asked Colonel Bramleigh bluntly, and with a look of almost sternness.

"I had asked you, sir, for a letter to Lady Augusta," said the curate, half offended at the manner of the last question.

"A letter to Lady Augusta?" repeated Bramleigh, dwelling on each word, as though by the effort he could recall to his mind something that had escaped him.

"I mean, sir, with reference to this appointment,—the chaplaincy," interposed L'Estrange, for he was offended at the hesitation, which he thought implied reluctance or disinclination on Colonel Bramleigh's part, and he hastened to show that it was not any claim he was preferring to her ladyship's acquaintance, but simply his desire to obtain her interest in his behalf.

"Influence! influence!" repeated Bramleigh to himself. "I have no doubt she has influence, such persons generally have. It is one of the baits that catch them! This little glimpse of power has a marvellous attraction—and these churchmen know so well how to display all their seductive arts before the eager eyes of the newly won convert. Yes, I am sure you are right, sir; Lady Augusta is one most likely to have influence,—you shall have the

letter you wish for. I do not say I will write it to-day, for I have a heavy press of correspondence before me, but if you will come up to-morrow, by luncheon time, or to dinner,—why not dine here?"

"I think I'd rather come up early, sir."

"Well, then, early be it. I'll have the letter for you. I wish I could remember something I know I had to say to you. What was it? What was it? Nothing of much consequence, perhaps, but still I feel as if—eh,—don't you feel so too?"

"I have not the slightest clue, sir, to what you mean."

"It wasn't about the mine—no. I think you see your way *there* clearly enough. It may be a good thing, or it may not. Cutbill is like the rest of them, not a greater rogue perhaps, nor need he be. They *are* such shrewd fellows, and as the money is your sister's,—trust money, too,—I declare I'd be cautious."

L'Estrange mumbled some words of assent; he saw that Bramleigh's manner betokened exhaustion and weariness, and he was eager to be gone. "Till to-morrow, then, sir," said he, moving to the door.

"You'll not dine with us? I think you might

though," muttered Bramleigh, half to himself. "I'm sure Culduff would make no show of awkwardness, nor would your sister either,—women never do. But do just what you like; my head is aching so, I believe I must lie down for an hour or two. Do you pass Belton's?"

"I could without any inconvenience; do you want him?"

"I fancy I'd do well to see him; he said something of cupping me the last day he was here,—would you mind telling him to give me a call?"

"May I come up in the evening, sir, and see how you are!"

"In the evening? this evening?" cried Bramleigh, in a harsh discordant voice. "Why, good heavens, sir! have a little, a very little discretion. You have been here since eleven; I marked the clock. It was not full five minutes after eleven, when you came in,—it's now past one. Two mortal hours,—and you ask me if you may return this evening; and I reply, sir, distinctly—No! Is that intelligible? I say—No!" As he spoke he turned away, and the curate, covered with shame and confusion, hastened out of the room, and down the

stairs, and out into the open air, dreading lest he should meet any one, and actually terrified at the thought of being seen. He plunged into the thickest of the shrubberies, and it was with a sense of relief he heard from a child that his sister had gone home some time before, and left word for him to follow her.

CHAPTER II.

THE CURATE CROSS-EXAMINED.

When the party returned from the picnic, it was to find Colonel Bramleigh very ill. Some sort of fit the doctor called it—not apoplexy nor epilepsy, but something that seemed to combine features of both. It had, he thought, been produced by a shock of some sort, and L'Estrange, who had last been with him before his seizure, was summoned to impart the condition in which he had found him, and whatever might serve to throw light on the attack.

If the curate was nervous and excited by the tidings that reached him of the Colonel's state, the examination to which he was submitted served little to restore calm to his system. Question after question poured in. Sometimes two or three would speak together, and all—except Ellen—accosted him

in a tone that seemed half to make him chargeable with the whole calamity. When asked to tell of what they had been conversing, and that he mentioned how Colonel Bramleigh had adverted to matters of faith and belief, Marion, in a whisper loud enough to be overheard, exclaimed, "I was sure of it. It was one of those priestly indiscretions; he would come talking to papa about what he calls his soul's health, and in this way brought on the excitement."

"Did you not perceive, sir," asked she, fiercely, "that the topic was too much for his nerves? Did it not occur to you that the moment was inopportune for a very exciting subject?"

"Was his manner easy and natural when you saw him first?" asked Augustus.

"Had he been reading that debate on Servia?" inquired Temple.

"Matter enough there, by Jove, to send the blood to a man's head," cried Culduff, warmly.

"I'm convinced it was all religious," chimed in Marion, who triumphed mercilessly over the poor parson's confusion. "It is what they call 'in season and out of season;' and they are true to their device,

for no men on earth more heartily defy the dictates of tact or delicacy."

"Oh, Marion, what are you saying?" whispered Nelly.

"It's no time for honeyed words, Ellen, in the presence of a heavy calamity, but I'd like to ask Mr. L'Estrange why, when he saw the danger of the theme they were discussing, he did not try to change the topic."

"So I did. I led him to talk of myself and my interests."

"An admirable antidote to excitement, certainly," muttured Culduff to Temple, who seemed to relish the joke intensely.

"You say that my father had been reading his letters—did he appear to have received any tidings to call for unusual anxiety?" asked Augustus.

"I found him—as I thought—looking very ill, careworn almost, when I entered. He had been writing, and seemed fatigued and exhausted. His first remark to me was, I remember, a mistake." L'Estrange here stopped suddenly. He did not desire to repeat the speech about being invited to the picnic. It would have been an awkwardness on all sides.

"What do you call a mistake, sir?" asked Marion, calmly.

"I mean he asked me something which a clearer memory would have reminded him not to have inquired after."

"This grows interesting. Perhaps you will enlighten us a little farther, and say what the blunder was."

"Well, he asked me how it happened that Julia and myself were not of the picnic, forgetting of course that we—we had not heard of it." A deep flush was now spread over his face and forehead, and he looked overwhelmed with shame.

"I see it all; I see the whole thing," said Marion, triumphantly. "It was out of the worldliness of the picnic sprung all the saintly conversation that ensued."

"No; the transition was more gradual," said L'Estrange, smiling, for he was at last amused at the asperity of this cross-examination. "Nor was there what you call any saintly conversation at all. A few remarks Colonel Bramleigh indeed made on the insufficiency of, not the church, but churchmen, to resolve doubts and difficulties."

"I heartily agree with him," broke in Lord Culduff, with a smile of much intended significance.

"And is it possible; are we to believe that all papa's attack was brought on by a talk over a picnic?" asked Marion.

"I think I told you that he received many letters by the post, and to some of them he adverted as being very important and requiring immediate attention. One that came from Rome appeared to cause him much excitement."

Marion turned away her head with an impatient toss, as though she certainly was not going to accept this explanation as sufficient.

"I shall want a few minutes with Mr. L'Estrange alone in the library, if I may be permitted," said the doctor, who had now entered the room after his visit to the sick man.

"I hope you may be more successful than we have been," whispered Marion as she sailed out of the room, followed by Lord Culduff; and after a few words with Augustus, the doctor and L'Estrange retired to confer in the library.

"Don't flurry me; take me quietly, doctor," said the curate, with a piteous smile. "They've given

me such a burster over the deep ground that I'm completely blown. Do you know," added he, seriously, "they've cross-questioned me in a way that would imply that I am the cause of this sudden seizure."

"No, no; they couldn't mean that."

"There's no excuse then for the things Miss Bramleigh said to me."

"Remember what an anxious moment it is; people don't measure their expressions when they are frightened. When they left him in the morning he was in his usual health and spirits, and they come back to find him very ill—dangerously ill. That alone would serve to palliate any unusual show of eagerness. Tell me now, was he looking perfectly himself, was he in his ordinary spirits, when you met him?"

"No; I thought him depressed, and at times irritable."

"I see; he was hasty and abrupt. He did not brook contradiction, perhaps?"

"I never went that far. If I dissented once or twice, I did so mildly and even doubtingly."

"Which made him more exacting, and more intolerant, you would say?"

"Possibly it did. I remember he rated me rather sharply for not being contented with a very humble condition in life, though I assured him I felt no impatience at my lowly state and was quite satisfied to wait till better should befall me. He called me a casuist for saying this, and hinted that all churchmen had the leaven of the Jesuit in them; but he got out of this after a while, and promised to write a letter in my behalf."

"And which he told me you would find sealed and addressed on this table here. Here it is."

"How kind of him to remember me through all his suffering."

"He said something about it being the only reparation he could make you, but his voice was not very clear or distinct, and I couldn't be sure I caught his words correctly."

"Reparation! he owed me none."

"Well, well, it is possible I may have mistaken him. One thing is plain enough: you cannot give me any clue to this seizure beyond the guess that it may have been some tidings he received by post."

L'Estrange shook his head in silence, and after a moment said, "Is the attack serious?"

"Highly so."

"And is his life in danger?"

"A few hours will decide that, but it may be days before we shall know if his mind will recover. Craythorpe has been sent for from Dublin, and we shall have his opinion this evening. I have no hesitation in saying that mine is unfavourable."

"What a dreadful thing, and how fearfully sudden. I cannot conceive how he could have bethought him of the letter for me at such a moment."

"He wrote it, he said, as you left him; you had not quitted the house when he began. He said to me, 'I saw I was growing worse, I felt my confusion was gaining on me, and a strange commixture of people and events was occurring in my head; so I swept all my letters and papers into a drawer and locked it, wrote the few lines I had promised, and with my almost last effort of consciousness rang the bell for my servant."

"But he was quite collected when he told you this?"

"Yes, it was in one of those lucid intervals when the mind shines out clear and brilliant; but the

effort cost him dearly: he has not rallied from it since."

"Has he over-worked himself; is this the effect of an over-exerted brain?"

"I'd call it rather the result of some wounded sensibility; he appears to have suffered some great reverse in ambition or in fortune. His tone, so far as I can fathom it, implies intense depression. After all, we must say he met much coldness here: the people did not visit him, there was no courtesy, no kindliness, shown him; and though he seemed indifferent to it, who knows how he may have felt it?"

"I do not suspect he gave any encouragement to intimacy; he seemed to me as if declining acquaintance with the neighbourhood."

"Ay; but it was in resentment, I opine; but *you* ought to know best. You were constantly here?"

"Yes, very frequently; but I am not an observant person; all the little details which convey a whole narrative to others are utterly lost upon *me*."

The doctor smiled. It was an expression that appeared to say he concurred in the curate's version of his own nature.

"It is these small gifts of combining, arranging, sifting, and testing, that we doctors have to cultivate," said he, as he took his hat. "The patient the most eager to be exact and truthful will, in spite of himself, mislead and misguide us. There is a strange bend sinister in human nature, against sincerity, that will indulge itself even at the cost of life itself. You are the physician of the soul, sir; but take my word for it, you might get many a shrewd hint and many a useful suggestion from us, the meaner workmen, who only deal with nerves and arteries."

As he wended his solitary road homewards, L'Estrange pondered thoughtfully over the doctor's words. He had no need, he well knew, to be reminded of his ignorance of mankind; but here was a new view of it, and it seemed immeasurable.

On the whole he was a sadder man than usual on that day. The world around him, that narrow circle whose diameter was perhaps a dozen miles or so, was very sombre in its colouring. He had left sickness and sorrow in a house where he had hitherto only seen festivity and pleasure; and worse again as regarded himself, he had carried away none of those kindlier sympathies and friendly feelings which were

wont to greet him at the Great House. Were they really then changed to him? and if so, why so? There is a moral chill in the sense of estrangement from those we have lived with on terms of friendship that, like the shudder that precedes ague, seems to threaten that worse will follow. Julia would see where the mischief lay had she been in his place. Julia would have read the mystery, if there were a mystery, from end to end; but *he*, he felt it, he had no powers of observation, no quickness, no tact; he saw nothing that lay beneath the surface, nor, indeed, much that was on the surface. All that he knew was, that at the moment when his future was more uncertain than ever, he found himself more isolated and friendless than ever he remembered to have been. The only set-off against all this sense of desertion was the letter which Colonel Bramleigh had written in his behalf, and which he had remembered to write as he lay suffering on his sick bed. He had told the doctor where to find it, and said it lay sealed and directed. The address was there, but no seal. It was placed in an open envelope, on which was written "Favoured by the Rev. G. L'Estrange." Was the omission of the seal

accident or intention? Most probably accident, because he spoke of having sealed it. And yet that might have been a mere phrase to imply that the letter was finished. Such letters were probably in most cases either open, or only closed after being read by him who bore them. Julia would know this. Julia would be able to clear up this point, thought he, as he pondered and plodded homeward.

CHAPTER III.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

"And here is the letter, Julia," said L'Estrange, as they sat at tea together that same evening. "Here is the letter; and if I were as clever a casuist as Colonel Bramleigh thought me, I should perhaps know whether I have the right to read it or not."

"Once I have begun to discuss such a point, I distrust my judgment; but when I pronounce promptly, suddenly, out of mere woman's instinct, I have great faith in myself."

"And how does your woman's instinct incline here?"

"Not to read it. It may or may not have been the writer's intention to have sealed it; the omission was possibly a mere accident. At all events, to have shown you the contents would have been a courtesy at the writer's option. He was not so inclined——"

"Stop a bit, Julia," cried he, laughing. "Here you are arguing the case, after having given me the instinctive impulse that would not wait for logic. Now, I'll not stand 'floggee and preachee' too."

"Don't you see, sir," said she, with a mock air of being offended, "that the very essence of this female instinct is its being the perception of an inspired process of reasoning, an instinctive sense of right, that did not require a mental effort to arrive at."

"And this instinctive sense of right says, Don't read?"

"Exactly so."

"Well, I don't agree with you," said he, with a sigh. "I don't know, and I want to know, in what light Colonel Bramleigh puts me forward. Am I a friend? am I a dependant? am I a man worth taking some trouble about? or am I merely, as I overheard him saying to Lord Culduff, 'a young fellow my boys are very fond of?'"

"Oh, George. You never told me this."

"Because it's not safe to tell you anything. You are sure to resent things you ought never to show you have known. I'd lay my life on it that had

you heard that speech, you'd have contrived to introduce it into some narrative or some description before a week went over."

"Well, it's a rule of war, if the enemy fire unfair ammunition, you may send it back to him."

"And then," said L'Estrange, reverting to his own channel of thought, "and then it's not impossible that it might be such a letter as I would not have stooped to present."

"If I were a man, nothing would induce me to accept a letter of introduction to any one," said she, boldly. "It puts every one concerned in a false position. 'Give the bearer ten pounds' is intelligible; but when the request is, 'Be polite to the gentleman who shall deliver this; invite him to dine; present him to your wife and daughters; give him currency amongst your friends;' all because of certain qualities which have met favour with some one else; why, this subverts every principle of social intercourse; this strikes at the root of all that lends a charm to intimacy. *I* want to find out the people who suit me in life, just as I want to display the traits that may attract others to *me*."

"I'd like to know what's inside this," said L'Estrange, who only half followed what she was saying.

"Shall I tell you?" said she, gravely.

"Do, if you can."

"Here it is:—'The bearer of this is a young fellow who has been our parson for some time back, and now wants to be yours at Albano. There's not much harm in him; he is well-born, well-mannered, preaches but twelve minutes, and rides admirably to hounds. Do what you can for him; and believe me yours truly.'"

"If I thought——"

"Of course you'd put it in the fire," said she, finishing his speech; "and I'd have put it there though it should contain something exactly the reverse of all this."

"The doctor told me that Bramleigh said something about a reparation that he owed me; and although the phrase, coming from a man in his state, might mean nothing, or next to nothing, it still keeps recurring to my mind, and suggesting an eager desire to know what he could point to."

"Perhaps his conscience pricked him, George,

for not having made more of you while here. I'd almost say it might with some justice."

"I think they have shown us great attention—have been most hospitable and courteous to us."

"I'm not a fair witness, for I have no sort of gratitude for social civilities. I think it's always the host is the obliged person."

"I know you do," said he, smiling.

"Who knows," said she warmly, "if he has not found out that the 'young fellow the boys were so fond of,' was worthy of favour in higher quarters? Eh, George, might not this give the clue to the reparation he speaks of?"

"I can make nothing of it," said he, as he tossed the letter on the table with an impatient movement. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Julia," cried he, after a pause. "I'll take the letter over to Castello to-morrow, and ask Augustus if he feels at liberty to read it to me; if he opine not, I'll get him to seal it then and there."

"But suppose he consents to read it, and suppose it should contain something, I'll not say offensive, but something disagreeable, something that you certainly would not wish to have said;

will you be satisfied at being the listener while he reads it?"

"I think I'd rather risk that than bear my present uncertainty."

"And if you'll let me, George, I'll go with you. I'll loiter about the grounds, and you can tell Nelly where to find me, if she wishes to see me."

"By the way, she asked me why you had not been to Castello; but my head being very full of other things, I forgot to tell you; and then there was something else I was to say."

"Try and remember it, George," said she, coaxingly.

"What was it? Was it?—no—it couldn't have been about Lord Culduff carrying away the doctor to his own room, and having him there full half-an-hour in consultation before he saw Colonel Bramleigh."

"Did he do that?"

"Yes. It was some redness, or some heat, or something or other that he remarked about his ears after eating. No, no; it wasn't that. I remember all about it now. It was a row that Jack got into with his Admiral; he didn't report himself, or he

reported to the wrong man, or he went on board when he oughtn't; in fact, he did something irregular, and the Admiral used some very hard language, and Jack rejoined, and the upshot is he's to be brought before a court-martial; at least he fears so."

"Poor fellow; what is to become of him?"

"Nelly says that there is yet time to apologize; that the Admiral will permit him to retract or recall what he said, and that his brother officers say he ought—some of them at least."

"And it was this you forgot to tell me?" said she, reproachfully.

"No. It was all in my head, but along with so many things; and then I was so badgered and bullied by the cross-examination they submitted me to; and so anxious and uneasy, that it escaped me till now."

"Oh, George, let us do a good-natured thing; let us go over and see Nelly; she'll have so many troubles on her heart, she'll want a word of advice and kindness. Let us walk over there now."

"It's past ten o'clock, Julia."

"Yes; but they're always late at Castello."

"And raining heavily besides;—listen to that!"

"What do we care for rain? did bad weather ever keep either of us at home when we wished to be abroad?"

"We can go to-morrow. I shall have to go to-morrow about this letter."

"But if we wait we shall lose a post. Come, George, get your coat and hat, and I'll be ready in an instant."

"After all, it will seem so strange in us presenting ourselves at such an hour, and in such a trim. I don't know how we shall do it."

"Easily enough. I'll go to Mrs. Eady the housekeeper's room, and you'll say nothing about me, except to Nelly; and as for yourself, it will be only a very natural anxiety on your part to learn how the Colonel is doing. There, now, don't delay. Let us be off at once."

"I declare I think it a very mad excursion, and the only thing certain to come of it will be a heavy cold or a fever."

"And we face the same risks every day for nothing. I'm sure wet weather never kept you from joining the hounds."

This home-thrust about the very point on which

he was then smarting decided the matter, and he arose and left the room without a word.

"Yes," muttered he, as he mounted the stairs, "there it is! That's the reproach I can never make head against. The moment they say, 'You were out hunting,' I stand convicted at once."

There was little opportunity for talk as they breasted the beating rain on their way to Castello; great sheets of water came down with a sweeping wind, which at times compelled them to halt and seek shelter ere they could recover breath to go on.

"What a night," muttered he. "I don't think I was ever out in a worse."

"Isn't it rare fun, George?" said she, laughingly. "It's as good as swimming in a rough sea."

"Which I always hated."

"And which I delighted in! Whatever taxes one's strength to its limits, and exacts all one's courage besides, is the most glorious of excitements. There's a splash; that was hail, George."

He muttered something that was lost in the noise of the storm; and though from time to time she tried to provoke him to speak, now by some lively taunt, now by some jesting remark on his

sullen humour, he maintained his silence till he reached the terrace, when he said,—

"Here we are, and I declare, Julia, I'd rather go back than go forward."

"You shan't have the choice," said she laughing, as she rang the bell. "How is your master, William?" asked she, as the servant admitted them.

"No better, miss; the Dublin doctor's upstairs now in consultation, and I believe there's another to be sent for."

"Mind that you don't say I'm here. I'm going to Mrs. Eady's room to dry my cloak, and I don't wish the young ladies to be disturbed," said she, passing hastily on to the housekeeper's room, while L'Estrange made his way to the drawing-room. The only person here, however, was Mr. Harding, who, with his hands behind his back and his head bowed forward, was slowly pacing the room in melancholy fashion.

"Brain fever, sir," muttered he, in reply to the curate's inquiry. "Brain fever, and of a severe kind. Too much application to business—did not give up in time, they say."

"But he looked so well; seemed always so hearty and so cheerful."

"Very true, sir, very true; but as you told us on Sunday, in that impressive discourse of yours, we are only whited sepulchres."

L'Estrange blushed. It was so rare an event for him to be complimented on his talents as a preacher that he half mistrusted the eulogy.

"And what else, indeed, are we?" sighed the little man. "Here's our dear friend, with all that the world calls prosperity; he has fortune, station, a fine family, and——"

The enumeration of the gifts that made up this lucky man's measure of prosperity was here interrupted by the entrance of Ellen Bramleigh, who came in abruptly and eagerly.

"Where's Julia?" cried she; "my maid told me she was here."

L'Estrange answered in a low tone. Ellen, in a subdued voice, said,—

"I'll take her up to my room. I have much to say to her. Will you let her remain here to-night? —you can't refuse. It is impossible she could go back in such weather." And without waiting for his reply, she hurried away.

"I suppose they sent for you, sir?" resumed

Harding. "They wished you to see him?" and he made a slight gesture, to point out that he meant the sick man.

"No; I came up to see if I could say a few words to Augustus—on a matter purely my own."

"Ha! indeed! I'm afraid you are not likely to have the opportunity. This is a trying moment, sir. Dr. B., though only a country practitioner, is a man of much experience, and he opines that the membranes are affected."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; he thinks it's the membranes; and he derives his opinion from the nature of the mental disturbance, for there are distinct intervals of perfect sanity—indeed, of great mental power. The Colonel was a remarkable man, Mr. L'Estrange; a very remarkable man."

"I've always heard so."

"Ah, sir, he had great projects—I might call them grand projects, for Ireland, had he been spared to carry them out."

"Let us still hope that he may."

"No, no, sir, that is not to be; and if Belton be correct, it is as well, perhaps, it should not be.

Here he touched his forehead with the top of his finger, and gave a glance of most significant meaning.

"Does he apprehend permanent injury to the brain?"

The other pursed his mouth, and shook his head slowly, but did not speak.

"That's very dreadful," said L'Estrange, sadly.

"Indeed it is, sir; take this from us," and here he touched his head, "and what are we? What are we better than the beasts of the field? But why do I say this to you, sir? Who knows these things better than yourself?"

The curate was half inclined to smile at the ambiguity of the speech, but he kept his gravity, and nodded assent."

"Nobody had the slightest conception of his wealth," said Harding, coming up, and actually whispering the words into the other's ear. "We knew all about the estated property; I did at least, I knew every acre of it, and how it was let; but of his money in shares, in foreign securities, on mortgages, and in various investments; what he had out at venture in Assam and Japan, and what he drew

twenty-five per cent. from in Peru;—of these, sir, none of us had any conception; and would you believe it, Mr. L'Estrange, that he can talk of all these things at some moments as collectedly as if he was in perfect health? He was giving directions to Simcox about his will, and he said, 'Half a sheet of note-paper will do it, Simcox. I'll make my intentions very clear, and there will be nobody to dispute them. And as to details of what little—he called it little!—I possess in the world, I want no notes to aid my memory.' The doctor, however, positively prevented anything being done to-day, and strictly interdicted him from hearing any matters of business whatsoever. And it is strange enough, that if not brought up before him, he will not advert to these topics at all, but continue to wander on about his past life, and whether he had done wisely in this, or that, or the other, mixing very worldly thoughts and motives very oddly at times with those that belong to more serious considerations. Poor Mr. Augustus," continued he, after a short breathing moment. "He does not know what to do! He was never permitted to take any part in business, and he knows no more of Bramleigh and Underwood than

you do. And now he is obliged to open all letters marked immediate or urgent, and to make the best replies he can, to give directions, and to come to decisions, in fact, on things he never so much as heard of. And all this while he is well aware that if his father should recover, he'll not forgive him the liberty he has taken to open his correspondence. Can you imagine a more difficult or painful situation?"

"I think much of the embarrassment might be diminished, Mr. Harding, by his taking you into his counsels."

"Ah! and that's the very thing I'll not suffer him to do. No, no, sir, I know the Colonel too well for that. He may, when he is well and about again, he may forgive his son, his son and heir, for having possessed himself with a knowledge of many important details; but he'd not forgive the agent, Mr. Harding. I think I can hear the very words he'd use. He said once on a time to me, 'I want no Grand Vizier, Harding; I'm Sultan and Grand Vizier too.' So I said to Mr. Augustus, 'I've no head for business after dinner, and particularly when I have tasted your father's prime

Madeira.' And it was true, sir; true as you stand there. The doctor and I had finished the second decanter before we took our coffee."

L'Estrange now looked the speaker fully in the face; and to his astonishment saw that signs of his having drank freely—which, strangely enough, had hitherto escaped his notice—were now plainly to be seen there.

"No, sir, not a bit tipsy," said Harding, interpreting his glance; "not even what Mr. Cutbill calls 'tight!' I won't go so far as to say I'd like to make up a complicated account; but for an off-hand question as to the value of a standing crop, or an allowance for improvements in the case of a tenant-at-will, I'm as good as ever I felt. What's more, sir, it's seventeen years since I took so much wine before. It was the day I got my appointment to the agency, Mr. L'Estrange. I was weak enough to indulge on that occasion, and the Colonel said to me, 'As much wine as you like, Harding—a pipe of it, if you please; but don't be garrulous.' The word sobered me, sir,—sobered me at once. I was offended, I'll not deny it; but I couldn't afford to show that I felt it. I

shut up; and from that hour to this I never was 'garrulous' again. Is it boasting to say, sir, that it's not every man who could do as much?"

The curate bowed politely, as if in concurrence.

"You never thought me garrulous, sir?"

"Never, indeed, Mr. Harding."

"No, sir, it was not the judgment the world passed on me. Men have often said Harding is cautious, Harding is reserved, Harding is guarded in what he says; but none have presumed to say I was garrulous."

"I must say I think you dwell too much on a mere passing expression. It was not exactly polite; but I am sure it was not intended to convey either a grave censure or a fixed opinion."

"I hope so; I hope so, with all my heart, sir," said he pathetically. But his drooping head and depressed look showed how little of encouragement the speech gave him.

"Mr. Augustus begs you'll come to him in the library, sir," said a footman, entering, and to L'Estrange's great relief, coming to his rescue from his tiresome companion.

"I think I'd not mention the matter *now*,"

said Harding, with a sigh. "They've trouble and sickness in the house, and the moment would be unfavourable; but you'll not forget it, sir, you'll not forget that I want that expression recalled, or at least the admission that it was used inadvertently."

L'Estrange nodded assent, and hurried away to the library.

"The man of all others I wanted to see," said Augustus, meeting him with an outstretched hand. "What on earth has kept you away from us of late?"

"I fancied you were all a little cold towards me," said the curate, blushing deeply as he spoke; "but if I thought you wanted me, I'd not have suffered my suspicion to interfere. I'd have come up at once."

"You're a good fellow, and I believe you thoroughly. There has been no coldness; at least, I can swear, none on my part, nor any that I know of elsewhere. We are in great trouble. You've heard about my poor father's seizure—indeed you saw him when it was impending, and now here am I in a position of no common difficulty. The

doctors have declared that they will not answer for his life, or, if he lives, for his reason, if he be disturbed or agitated by questions relating to business. They have, for greater impressiveness, given this opinion in writing, and signed it. I have telegraphed the decision to the Firm, and have received this reply, 'Open all marked urgent, and answer.' Now, you don't know my father very long, or very intimately, but I think you know enough of him to be aware what a dangerous step is this they now press me to take. First of all, I know no more of his affairs than you do. It is not only that he never confided anything to me, but he made it a rule never to advert to a matter of business before any of us. And to such an extent did he carry his jealousy—if it was jealousy—in this respect, that he would immediately interpose if Underwood or the senior clerk said anything about money matters, and remark, 'These young gentlemen take no interest in such subjects; let us talk of something they can take their share in.' Nor was this abstention on his part without a touch of sarcasm, for he would occasionally talk a little to my sister Marion on bank matters, and constantly

said, 'Why weren't you a boy, Marion? You could have taken the helm when it was my watch below.' This showed what was the estimate he had formed of myself and my brothers. I mention all these things to you now, that you may see the exact danger of the position I am forced to occupy. If I refuse to act, if I decline to open the letters on pressing topics, and by my refusal lead to all sorts of complication and difficulties, I shall but confirm him, whenever he recovers, in his depreciatory opinion of me; and if, on the other hand, I engage in the correspondence, who is to say that I may not be possessing myself of knowledge that he never intended I should acquire, and which might produce a fatal estrangement between us in future? And this is the doubt and difficulty in which you now find me. Here I stand surrounded with these letters—look at that pile yonder—and I have not courage to decide what course to take."

"And he is too ill to consult with?"

"The doctors have distinctly forbidden one syllable on any business matter."

"It's strange enough that it was a question which bore upon all this brought me up here to-

night. Your father had promised me a letter to Lady Augusta at Rome, with reference to a chaplaincy I was looking for, and he told Belton to inform me that he had written the letter and sealed it, and left it on the table in the library. We found it there, as he said, only not sealed; and though that point was not important, it suggested a discussion between Julia and myself whether I had or had not the right to read it, being a letter of presentation, and regarding myself alone. We could not agree as to what ought to be done, and resolved at last to take the letter over to you, and say, If you feel at liberty to let me hear what is in this, read it for me; if you have any scruples on the score of reading, seal it, and the matter is ended at once. This is the letter."

Augustus took it, and regarded it leisurely for a moment.

"I think I need have no hesitation here," said he. "I break no seal, at least."

He withdrew the letter carefully from the envelope, and opened it.

"'Dear Sedley,'" read he, and stopped. "Why, this is surely a mistake; this was not intended for

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Lady Augusta;" and he turned to the address, which ran, "The Lady Augusta Bramleigh, Villa Altieri, Rome." "What can this mean?"

"He has put it in a wrong envelope."

"Exactly so, and probably sealed the other, which led to his remark to Belton. I suppose it may be read now. 'Dear Sedley—Have no fears about the registry. First of all, I do not believe any exists of the date required; and secondly, there will be neither church, nor parson, nor register here in three months hence.'" Augustus stopped and looked at L'Estrange. Each face seemed the reflex of the other, and the look of puzzled horror was the same on both. "I must go on, I can't help it," muttered Augustus, and continued: "'I have spoken to the dean, who agrees with me that Portshandon need not be retained as a parish. Something, of course, must be done for the curate here. You will probably be able to obtain one of the smaller livings for him in the Chancellor's patronage. So much for the registry difficulty, which indeed was never a difficulty at all till it occurred to your legal acuteness to make it such.'

"There is more here, but I am unwilling to read

on," said Augustus, whose face was now crimson, "and yet, L'Estrange," added he, "it may be that I shall want your counsel in this very matter. I'll finish it." And he read, "'The more I reflect on the plan of a compromise the less I like it, and I cannot for the life of me see how it secures finality. If this charge is to be revived in my son's time, it will certainly not be met with more vigour or more knowledge than I can myself contribute to it. Every impostor gains by the lapse of years—bear *that* in mind. The difficulties which environ explanations are invariably in favour of the rogue, just because fiction is more plausible often than truth. It is not pleasant to admit, but I am forced to own that there is not one amongst my sons who has either the stamina or the energy to confront such a peril; so that, if the battle be really to be fought, let it come on while I am yet here, and in health and vigour to engage in it.

"'There are abundant reasons why I cannot confide the matter to any of my family—one will suffice: there is not one of them except my eldest daughter who would not be crushed by the tidings, and though she has head enough,

she has not the temper for a very exciting and critical struggle.

"'What you tell me of Jack and his indiscretion will serve to show you how safe I should be in the hands of my sons, and he is possibly about as wise as his brothers, though less pretentious than the diplomatist; and as for Augustus, I have great misgivings. If the time should ever come when he should have convinced himself that this claim was good,—and sentimental reasons would always have more weight with him than either law or logic,—I say, if such a time should arrive, he's just the sort of nature that would prefer the martyrdom of utter beggary to the assertion of his right, and the vanity of being equal to the sacrifice would repay him for the ruin. There *are* fellows of this stamp, and I have terrible fears that I have one of them for a son.'"

Augustus laid down the letter and tried to smile, but his lip trembled hysterically, and his voice was broken and uncertain as he said: "This is a hard sentence, George,—I wish I had never read it. What can it all mean?" cried he, after a minute or more of what seemed cruel suffering. "What is

this claim? Who is this rogue? and what is this charge that can be revived and pressed in another generation? Have you ever heard of this before? or can you make anything out of it now? Tell me, for mercy's sake, and do not keep me longer in this agony of doubt and uncertainty."

"I have not the faintest clue to the meaning of all this. It reads as if some one was about to prefer a claim to your father's estate, and that your lawyer had been advising a compromise with him."

"But a compromise is a sort of admission that the claimant was not an impostor,—that he had his rights!"

"There are rights, and rights! There are demands, too, that it is often better to conciliate than to defy,—even though defiance would be successful."

"And how is it that I never heard of this before?" burst he out indignantly. "Has a man the right to treat his son in this fashion? to bring him up in the unbroken security of succeeding to an inheritance that the law may decide he has no title to?"

"I think that is natural enough. Your father

evidently did not recognize this man's right, and felt there was no need to impart the matter to his family."

"But why should my father be the judge in his own cause?"

L'Estrange smiled faintly: the line in the Colonel's letter, in which he spoke of his son's sensitiveness, occurred to him at once.

"I see how you treat my question," said Augustus. "It reminds you of the character my father gave me. What do you say then to that passage about the registry? Why, if we be clean-handed in this business, do we want to make short work of all records?"

"I simply say I can make nothing of it."

"Is it possible, think you, that Marion knows this story?"

"I think it by no means unlikely."

"It would account for much that has often puzzled me," said Augustus, musing as he spoke. "A certain self-assertion that she has, and a habit, too, of separating her own interests from those of the rest of us, as though speculating on a time when she should walk alone. Have you remarked that?"

"*I!* I," said L'Estrange, smiling, "remark nothing! there is not a less observant fellow breathing.

"If it were not for those words about the parish registry, George," said the other, in a grave tone, "I'd carry a light heart about all this; I'd take my father's version of this fellow, whoever he is, and believe him to be an impostor; but I don't like the notion of foul play, and it does mean foul play."

L'Estrange was silent, and for some minutes neither spoke.

"When my father," said Augustus—and there was a tone of bitterness now in his voice—"When my father drew that comparison between himself and his sons, he may have been flattering his superior intellect at the expense of some other quality."

Another and a longer pause succeeded.

At last L'Estrange spoke:—

"I have been running over in my head all that could bear upon this matter, and now I remember a couple of weeks ago that Longworth, who came with a French friend of his to pass an evening at the cottage, led me to talk of the parish church

and its history: he asked me if it had not been burnt by the rebels in '98, and seemed surprised when I said it was only the vestry-room and the books that had been destroyed. 'Was not that strange?' asked he; 'did the insurgents usually interest themselves about parochial records?' I felt a something like a sneer in the question, and made him no reply."

"And who was the Frenchman?"

"A certain Count Pracontal, whom Longworth met in Upper Egypt. By the way, he was the man Jack led over the high bank, where the poor fellow's leg was broken."

"I remember; he of course has no part in the story we are now discussing. Longworth may possibly know something. Are you intimate with him?"

"No, we are barely acquainted. I believe he was rather flattered by the very slight attention we showed himself and his friend; but his manner was shy, and he is a diffident, bashful sort of man, not easy to understand."

"Look here, L'Estrange," said Augustus, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "All that has

passed between us here to-night is strictly confidential, to be divulged to no one, not even your sister. As for this letter, I'll forward it to Sedley, for whom it was intended. I'll tell him how it chanced that I read it; and then—and then—the rest will take its own course."

"I wonder if Julia intends to come back with me?" said L'Estrange after a pause.

"No. Nelly has persuaded her to stay here, and I think there is no reason why you should not also."

"No. I'm always uncomfortable away from my own den; but I'll be with you early to-morrow; good-night."

Nelly and Julia did not go to bed till day-break. They passed the night writing a long letter to Jack —the greater part being dictated by Julia while Nelly wrote. It was an urgent entreaty to him to yield to the advice of his brother officers, and withdraw the offensive words he had used to the Admiral. It was not alone his station, his character, and his future in life were pressed into the service, but the happiness of all who loved him and wished him well, with a touching allusion to his poor father's condi-

tion, and the impossibility of asking any aid or counsel from him. Nelly went on—"Remember, dear Jack, how friendless and deserted I shall be if I lose you; and it would be next to losing you to know you had quitted the service, and gone heaven knows where, to do heaven knows what." She then adverted to home, and said, "You know how happy and united we were all here, once on a time. This has all gone: Marion and Temple hold themselves quite apart, and Augustus, evidently endeavouring to be neutral, is isolated. I only say this to show you how, more than ever, I need your friendship and affection; nor is it the least sad of all my tidings, the L'Estranges are going to leave this. There is to be some new arrangement by which Portshannon is to be united to Kilmullock, and one church to serve for the two parishes. George and Julia think of going to Italy. I can scarcely tell you how I feel this desertion of me now, dearest Jack. I'd bear up against all these and worse—if worse there be—were I only to feel that you were following out your road to station and success, and that the day was coming when I should be as proud as I am fond of you. You hate writing, I know,

but you will, I'm sure, not fail to send me half-a-dozen lines to say that I have not pleaded in vain. I fear I shall not soon be able to send you pleasant news from this, the gloom thickens every day around us, but you shall hear constantly." The letter ended with a renewed entreaty to him to place himself in the hands and under the guidance of such of his brother officers as he could rely on for sound judgment and moderation. "Remember, Jack, I ask you to do nothing that shall peril honour; but also nothing in anger, nothing out of wounded self-love."

"Add one line, only one, Julia," said she, handing the pen to her and pushing the letter before her; and without a word Julia wrote:—"A certain coquette of your acquaintance—heartless of course as all her tribe—is very sorry for your trouble, and would do all in her power to lessen it. To this end she begs you to listen patiently to the counsels of the present letter, every line of which she has read, and to believe that in yielding something—if it should be so—to the opinion of those who care for you, you acquire a new right to their affection, and a stronger title to their love."

Nelly threw her arm around Julia's neck and kissed her again and again.

"Yes, darling, these dear words will sink into his heart, and he will not refuse our prayer."

CHAPTER IV.

MARION'S AMBITIONS.

Colonel Bramleigh's malady took a strange form, and one which much puzzled his physicians: his feverish symptoms gradually disappeared, and to his paroxysms of passion and excitement there now succeeded a sort of dreary apathy, in which he scarcely uttered a word, nor was it easy to say whether he heard or heeded the remarks around him. This state was accompanied by a daily increasing debility, as though the powers of life were being gradually exhausted, and that, having no more to strive for or desire, he cared no more to live.

The whole interest of his existence now seemed to centre around the hour when the post arrived. He had ordered that the letter-bag should be opened in his presence, and as the letters were shown him one by one, he locked them, unopened and unread,

in a despatch-box, so far strictly obedient to the dictates of the doctor, who had forbidden him all species of excitement. His family had been too long accustomed to the reserve and distance he observed towards them to feel surprised that none were in this critical hour admitted to his confidence, and that it was in presence of his valet, Dorose, the letters were sorted and separated, and such as had no bearing on matters of business sent down to be read by the family.

It was while he continued in this extraordinary state, intermediate as it seemed between sleeping and waking, a telegram came from Sedley to Augustus, saying,—"Highly important to see your father. Could he confer with me if I go over? Reply at once." The answer was,—"Unlikely that you can see him; but come on the chance."

Before sending off this reply, Augustus had taken the telegram up to Marion's room, to ask her advice in the matter. "You are quite right, Gusty," said she, "for if Sedley cannot see papa, he can certainly see Lord Culduff."

"Lord Culduff," cried he, in amazement. "Why, what could Lord Culduff possibly know

about my father's affairs? How could he be qualified to give an opinion upon them?"

"Simply on the grounds of his great discrimination, his great acuteness, joined to a general knowledge of life, in which he has admittedly few rivals."

"Grant all that; but here are special questions, here are matters essentially personal; and with all his lordship's tact and readiness, yet he is not one of us."

"He may be, though, and very soon too," replied she, promptly.

"What do you mean?" asked he, in a voice of almost dismay.

"Just what I say, Augustus; and I am not aware it is a speech that need excite either the amazement or the terror I see in your face at this moment."

"I *am* amazed; and if I understand you aright, I have grounds to be shocked besides."

"Upon my word," said she, in a voice that trembled with passion, "I have reason to congratulate myself on the score of brotherly affection. Almost the last words Jack spoke to me at parting were,

'For God's sake, shake off that old scamp;' and now you—that hold a very different position amongst us—you, who will one day be the head of the family, deliberately tell me you are shocked at the prospect of my being allied to one of the first names in the peerage."

"My dear Marion," said he, tenderly, "it is not the name, it is not the rank, I object to."

"It is his fortune, then? I'm sure it can't be his abilities."

"It is neither. It is simply that the man might be your grandfather."

"Well, sir," said she, drawing herself up, and assuming a manner of intense hauteur, "and if *I*—I conclude I am the person most to be consulted—if I do not regard this disparity of years as an insurmountable obstacle, by what right can one of my family presume to call it such?"

"My dear sister," said he, "can you not imagine the right of a brother to consult for your happiness?"

"Happiness is a very large word. If it were for Nelly that you were interesting yourself, I've no doubt your advice and counsel ought to have great weight; but I am not one of your love-in-a-cottage

young ladies, Gusty. I am, I must own it, excessively worldly. Whatever happiness I could propose to myself in life is essentially united to a certain ambition. We have as many of the advantages of mere wealth as most people: as fine equipage, as many footmen, as gook a cook, and as costly silver; and what do they do for us? They permit us simply to enter the lists with a set of people who have high-stepping horses and powdered lacqueys like ourselves, but who are no more the world, no more society, than one of papa's Indiamen is a ship of the Royal Navy. Why do I say this to you, who were at Oxford, who saw it all,—ay, and felt it all,—in those fresh years of youth when these are sharp sufferings? You know well—you told me your griefs at the time—that you were in a set without being 'of it;' that the stamp of inequality was as indelibly fixed upon you as though you were a corporal and wore coarse cloth. Now, these things are hard to bear for a man, for a woman they are intolerable. She has not the hundred and one careers in life in which individual distinction can obliterate the claims of station. She has but one stage—the *salon;* but, to her, this narrow world, soft-carpeted and damask-curtained, is

a very universe, and without the recognized stamp of a certain rank in it, she is absolutely nothing."

"And may not all these things be bought too dearly, Marion?"

"I don't know the price I'd call too high for them."

"What! Not your daily happiness? not your self-esteem! not the want of the love of one who would have your whole heart in his keeping?"

"So he may, if he can give me the rank I care for."

"Oh, Marion! I cannot think this of you," cried he, bitterly.

"That is to say, that you want me to deceive you with false assurances of unbought affection and the like; and you are angry because I will not play the hypocrite. Lord Culduff has made me an offer of his hand, and I have accepted it. You are aware that I am my own mistress. Whatever I possess, it is absolutely my own; and though I intend to speak with my father, and, if it may be, obtain his sanction, I will not say that his refusal would induce me to break off my engagement."

"At all events, you are not yet this man's wife,

Marion," said he, with more determination than he had yet shown; "and I forbid you positively to impart to Lord Culduff anything regarding this telegram."

"I make no promises."

"You may have no regard for the interests of your family, but possibly you will care for some of your own," said he, fiercely. "Now, I tell you distinctly, there are very grave perils hanging over us at this moment—perils of which I cannot measure the amount nor the consequences. I can only dimly perceive the direction from which they come; and I warn you, for your own sake, make no confidences beyond the bounds of your own family."

"You are superbly mysterious, Gusty; and if I were impressionable on this kind of matter, I half suspect you might terrify me. Papa ought to have committed a forgery, at least, to justify your dark insinuations."

"There is no question of a forgery; but there may be that which, in the end, will lead to a ruin as complete as any forgery."

"I know what you mean," said she, in a careless, easy tone; "the bank has made use of private

securities and title-deeds, just as those other people did—I forget their names—a couple of years ago."

"It is not even that; but I repeat the consequences may be to the full as disastrous."

"You allude to this unhappy scrape of Jack's."

"I do not. I was not then thinking of it."

"Because as to that, Lord Culduff said there never yet grew a tree where there wasn't a branch or two might be lopped off with advantage. If Jack doesn't think his station in life worth preserving, all the teaching in the world won't persuade him to maintain it."

"Poor Jack!" said he, bitterly.

"Yes, I say, poor Jack! too. I think it's exactly the epithet to apply to one whose spirit is so much beneath his condition."

"You are terribly changed, Marion. I do not know if you are aware of it?"

"I hope I am. I trust that I look at the events around me from a higher level than I have been accustomed to hitherto."

"And is my father in a state to be consulted on a matter of this importance?" asked he, half indignantly.

"Papa has already been spoken to about it; and it is by his own desire we are both to see him this evening."

"Am I the only one here who knew nothing of all this?"

"You should have been told formally this morning, Augustus. Lord Culduff only waited for a telegram from Mr. Cutbill to announce to you his intentions and his—hopes." A slight hesitation delayed the word.

"These things I can't help," said he bitterly, and as if speaking to himself. "They have been done without my knowledge, and regardless of me in every way; but I do protest, strongly protest, against Lord Culduff being introduced into matters which are purely our own."

"I never knew till now that we had family secrets," said she, with an insolent air.

"You may learn it later on, perhaps, and without pleasure."

"So, then, these are the grave perils you tried to terrify me with a while ago. You forget, Augustus, that I have secured my passage in another ship. Personally, at least, I am in no danger."

"I did forget that. I did indeed forget how completely you could disassociate yourself from the troubles of your family."

"But what is going to happen to us? They can't shoot Jack because he called his commanding officer an ugly name. They can't indite papa because he refused to be high-sheriff. And if the world is angry with you, Gusty, it is not certainly because you like the company of men of higher station than your own."

He flushed at the sarcasm that her speech half revealed, and turned away to hide his irritation.

"Shall I tell you frankly, Gusty," continued she, "that I believe nothing—absolutely nothing—of these impending calamities? There is no sword suspended over us; or if there be, it is by a good strong cord, which will last our time. There are always plenty of dark stories in the City. Shares fall and great houses tumble; but papa told me scores of times that he never put all his eggs into one basket: and Bramleigh and Underwood will be good names for many a day to come. Shall I tell you, my dear Augustus, what I suspect to be the greatest danger that now hangs over us? And I am quite ready to admit it is a heavy one."

"What is it?"

"The peril *I* mean is, that your sister Nelly will marry the curate. Oh, you may look shocked and incredulous, and cry impossible, if you like; but we girls are very shrewd detectives over each other, and what I tell you is only short of certainty."

"He has not a shilling in the world; nor has she, independently of my father."

"That's the reason. That's the reason! These are the troths that are never broken. There is nothing aids fidelity like beggary."

"He has neither friends nor patrons; he told me himself he has not the vaguest hope of advancement."

"Exactly so; and just for that they will be married! Now it reminds me," said she, aloud, "of what papa once said to me. The man who wants to build up a name and a family, ought to have few children. With a large household, some one or other will make an unhappy alliance, and one deserter disgraces the army."

"A grave consideration for Lord Culduff at this moment," said he, with a humorous twinkle of the eye.

"We have talked it over already," said she.

"Once for all, Marion, no confidences about what I have been talking of." And so saying he went his way.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CUTBILL ARRIVES AT CASTELLO.

On the eve of that day on which the conversation in the last chaper occurred, Mr. Cutbill arrived at Castello. He came full of town news: he brought with him the latest scandals of society, and the last events in politics; he could tell of what was doing in Downing Street, and what was about to be done in the City. In fact, he had the sort of budget that was sure to amuse a country audience, and yet, to his astonishment, he found none to question, none even to listen to him. Colonel Bramleigh's illness had thrown a gloom over all. The girls relieved each other in watches beside their father, and Augustus and Temple dined together alone, as Lord Culduff's gout still detained him in his room. It was as the dinner drew to its close that Mr. Cutbill was announced.

"It ain't serious, I hope? I mean, they don't think the case dangerous?" said he, as he arranged his napkin on his knee.

Augustus only shook his head in silence.

"Why, what age is he? not sixty?"

"Fifty-one—fifty-two in June."

"That's not old; that's the prime of life, especially when a man has taken nothing out of himself."

"He was always temperate; most temperate."

"Just so: even his own choice Mouton didn't tempt him into the second bottle. I remember that well. I said to myself, 'Tom Cutbill, that green seal wouldn't fare so well in your keeping.' I had *such* a bag of news for him! All the rogueries on 'Change, fresh and fresh. I suppose it is quite hopeless to think of telling him now?"

"Not to be thought of."

"How he'd have liked to have heard about Hewlett and Bell! They're gone for close on two millions; they'll not pay over sixpence in the pound, and Rinker, the Bombay fellow that went in for cotton, has caught it too! Cotton and indigo have ruined more men than famine and pestilence. I'd be shot, if I was a Lord of the Council, if I wouldn't have a special

prayer for them in the Litany. Well, Temple, and how are you, all this while?" said he, turning abruptly to the diplomatist, who sat evidently inattentive to the dialogue.

"What, sir; did you address *me?*" cried he, with a look of astonishment and indignation.

"I should think I did; and I never heard you were Premier Earl, or that other thing of England, that you need look so shocked at the liberty! You Foreign Office swells are very grand folk to each other; but take my word for it, the world, the real world, thinks very little of you."

Temple arose slowly from his place, threw his napkin on the table, and turning to Augustus, said, "You'll find me in the library," and withdrew.

"That's dignified, I take it," said Cutbill; "but to my poor appreciation, it's not the way to treat a guest under his father's roof."

"A guest has duties, Mr. Cutbill, as well as rights; my brother is not accustomed to the sort of language you address to him, nor is he at all to blame if he decline to hear more of it."

"So that I am to gather you think he was right?"

Augustus bowed coldly.

"It just comes to what I said one day to Harding: the sailor is the only fellow in the house a man can get on with. I'm sorry, heartily sorry for him." The last words were in a tone of sincere feeling, and Augustus asked,—"What do you mean by sorry? what has happened to him?"

"Haven't you seen it in *The Times*—no, you couldn't, though—it was only in this morning's edition, and I have it somewhere. There's to be a court-martial on him; he's to be tried on board the *Ramsay*, at Portsmouth, for disobedience and indiscipline, and using to his superior officer—old Colthurst—words unbecoming the dignity of the service and the character of an officer, or the dignity of an officer and the character of the service—it's all the one gauge, but he'll be broke and cashiered all the same."

"I thought that if he were to recall something, if he would make some explanation, which he might without any peril to honour——"

"That's exactly how it was, and when I heard he was in a scrape I started off to Portsmouth to see him."

"You did?" exclaimed Augustus, looking now with a very different expression at the other.

"To be sure I did; I went down by the mail-train, and stayed with him till the one-forty express started next day, and I might have saved myself the trouble."

"You could make no impression upon him?"

"Not a bit—as well talk to that oak sideboard there; he'd sit and smoke and chat very pleasantly too, about anything, I believe; he'd tell about his life up in town, and what he lost at the races, and how near he was to a good thing on the Riddlesworth; but not a word, not so much as a syllable would he say about his own hobble. It was growing late; we had had a regular bang-up breakfast—turtle steaks and a devilled lobster, and plenty of good champagne—not the sweet stuff your father gives us down here—but dry 'mum,' that had a flavour of Marcobrunner about it. He's a rare fellow to treat a man, is Jack; and so I said—not going about the bush, but bang into the thicket at once—'What's this stupid row you've got into with your Admiral? what's it all about?'"

"'It's about a service regulation, Master

Cutbill,' said he, with a stiff look on him. 'A service regulation that you wouldn't understand if you heard it.'

"'You think,' said I, 'that out of culverts and cuttings, Tom Cutbill's opinion is not worth much?"

"'No, no, not that, Cutbill; I never said that,' said he, laughing; 'but you see that we sailors not only have all sorts of technicals for the parts of a ship, but we have technical meanings for even the words of common life, so that though I might call you a consummate humbug, I couldn't say as much to a Vice-Admiral without the risk of being judged by professional etiquette.'

"'But you didn't call him that, did you?' said I.

"'I'll call *you* worse, Cutty,' says he, laughing, 'if you don't take your wine.'

"'And now Jack,' said I, 'it's on the stroke of one; I must start with the express at one-forty, and as I came down here for nothing on earth but to see if I could be of any use to you, don't let me go away only as wise as I came; be frank, and tell me all about this business, and when I go back to town it will push me hard if I can't do something with the Somerset House fellows to pull you through.'

"'You are a good-hearted dog, Cutty,' said he, 'and I thought so the first day I saw you; but my scrape, as you call it, is just one of those things you'd only blunder in. My fine brother Temple, or that much finer gentleman Lord Culduff, who can split words into the thinnest of veneers, might possibly make such a confusion that it would be hard to see who was right or who was wrong in the whole affair; but *you*, Cutty, with your honest intentions and your vulgar good sense, would be sure to offend every one. There, don't lose your train; don't forget the cheroots and the punch, and some pleasant books, if they be writing any such just now.'

"'If you want money,' said I—'I mean for the defence.'

"'Not sixpence for the lawyers, Cutty; of that you may take your oath,' said he, as he shook my hand. 'I'd as soon think of sending the wardroom dinner overboard to the sharks.' We parted, and the next thing I saw of him was that paragraph in *The Times*."

"How misfortunes thicken around us. About a month or six weeks ago when you came down here first, I suppose there wasn't a family in the kingdom could call itself happier."

"You *did* look jolly, that I *will* say; but somehow—you'll not take the remark ill—I saw that, as we rail-folk say, it was a capital line for ordinary regular traffic, but would be sure to break down if you had a press of business."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean that, so long as it was only a life of daily pleasure and enjoyment was before you—that the gravest question of the day was what horse you'd ride, or whom you'd invite to dinner,—so long as that lasted, the machine would work well,—no jar, no friction anywhere; but if once trouble—and I mean real trouble—was to come down upon you, it would find you all at sixes and sevens,—no order, no discipline anywhere, and, what's worse, no union. But you know it better than I do. You see yourself that no two of you pull together; ain't that a fact?"

Augustus shook his head mournfully, but was silent.

"I like to see people jolly, because they understand each other and are fond of each other, because they take pleasure in the same things, and feel that the success of one is the success of all. There's no merit in being jolly over ten thousand a year and a

house like Windsor Castle. Now, just look at what is going on, I may call it, under our noses here: does your sister Marion care a brass farthing for Jack's misfortunes, or does he feel a bit elated about her going to marry a viscount? Are you fretting your heart to ribbons because that fine young gent that left us a while ago is about to be sent envoy to Bogota? And that's fact, though he don't know it yet," added he, in a chuckling whisper. "It's a regular fairweather family, and if it comes on to blow, you'll see if there's a storm-sail amongst you."

"Apparently, then, you were aware of what was only divulged to me this evening?" said Augustus. "I mean the intended marriage of Lord Culduff to my sister."

"I should say I was aware of it. I was, so to say, promoter and projector. It was I started the enterprise. It was that took me over to town. I went to square that business of old Culduff. There was a question to be asked in the House about his appointment that would have led to a debate, or what they call a conversation—about the freest kind of after-dinner talk imaginable—and they'd have ripped up the old reprobate's whole life—and I

assure *you* there are passages in it wouldn't do for the *Methodists' Magazine*—so I went over to negotiate a little matter with Joel, who had, as I well knew, a small sheaf of Norton's bills. I took Joel down to Greenwich to give him a fish-dinner and talk the thing over, and we were right comfortable and happy over some red Hermitage—thirty shillings a bottle, mind you—when we heard a yell, just a yell, from the next room, and in walks—whom do you think?—Norton himself, with his napkin in his hand—he was dining with a set of fellows from the Garrick, and he swaggered in and sat down at our table. 'What infernal robbery are you two concocting here?' said he. 'When the waiter told me who were the fellows at dinner together, I said, 'These rascals are like the witches in Macbeth, and they never meet without there's mischief in the wind.'"

"The way he put it was so strong, there was something so home in it, that I burst out and told him the whole story, and that it was exactly himself, and no other, was the man we were discussing.

"'And you thought,' said he, 'you thought that, if you had a hold of my acceptances, you'd put the screw on me and squeeze me as flat as you pleased.

Oh, generation of silkworms, ain't you soft!' cried he, laughing. 'Order up another bottle of this, for I want to drink your healths. You've actually made my fortune! The thing will now be first-rate. The Culduff inquiry was a mere matter of public morals, but here, here is a direct attempt to coerce or influence a Member of Parliament. I'll have you both at the Bar of the House as sure as my name is Norton.'

"He then arose and began to rehearse the speech he'd make when we were arraigned, and a spicier piece of abuse I never listened to. The noise he made brought the other fellows in from the next room, and he ordered them to make a house, and one was named speaker and another black rod, and we were taken into custody and duly purged of our contempt by paying for all the wine drank by the entire company, a trifle of five-and-thirty pounds odd. The only piece of comfort I got at all was getting into the rail to go back to town, when Norton whispered me, 'It's all right about Culduff. Parliament is dissolved; the House rises on Tuesday, and he'll not be mentioned.'"

"But does all this bear upon the question of marriage?"

"Quite naturally. Your father pulls Culduff out of the mire, and the viscount proposes for your sister. It's all contract business the whole world over. By the way, where is our noble friend? I suppose, all things considered, I owe him a visit."

"You'll find him in his room. He usually dines alone, and I believe Temple is the only one admitted."

"I'll send up my name," said he, rising to ring the bell for the servant; and I'll call myself lucky if he'll refuse to see me."

"His lordship will be glad to see Mr. Cutbill as soon as convenient to him," replied the servant on his return.

"All my news for him is not so favourable as this," whispered Cutbill, as he moved away. "They won't touch the mine in the City. That last murder, though it was down in Tipperary, a hundred and fifty miles away from this, has frightened them all; and they say they're quite ready to do something at Lagos, or the Gaboon, but nothing here. 'You see,' say they, 'if they cut one or two of our people's heads off in Africa, we get up a gun-brig, and burn the barracoons and slaughter a whole village for it, and this restores confidence; but in Ireland it always

ends with a debate in the House, that shows the people to have great wrongs and great patience, and that their wild justice, as some one called it, was all right; and that, sir, *that* does not restore confidence.' Good-night."

CHAPTER VI.

THE VILLA ALTIERI.

THERE is a short season in which a villa within the walls of old Rome realizes all that is positive ecstasy in the life of Italy. This season begins usually towards the end of February and continues through the month of March. This interval—which in less favoured lands is dedicated to storms of rain and sleet, east winds and equinoctial gales, tumbling chimney-pots and bronchitis—is here signalized by all that Spring, in its most voluptuous abundance, can pour forth: vegetation comes out, not with the laggard step of northern climes—slow, cautious, and distrustful—but bursting at once from bud to blossom as though impatient for the fresh air of life and the warm rays of the sun. The very atmosphere laughs and trembles with vitality: from the panting lizard on the urn to the myriad of insects on the grass,

it is life everywhere; and over all sweeps the delicious odour of the verbena and the violet, almost overpowering with perfume, so that one feels, in such a land, the highest ecstasy of existence is that same dreamy state begotten of impressions derived from blended sense, where tone and tint and odour mingle almost into one.

Perhaps the loveliest spot of Rome in this loveliest of seasons was the Villa Altieri. It stood on a slope of the Pincian, defended from north and east, and looking eastward over the Campagna towards the hills of Albano. A thick ilex grove, too thick and dark for Italian, though perfect to English taste, surrounded the house, offering alleys of shade that even the noonday's sun found impenetrable; while beneath the slope, and under shelter of the hill, lay a delicious garden, memorable by a fountain designed by Thorwaldsen, where four Naiades splash the water at each other under the fall of a cataract; this being the costly caprice of the Cardinal Altieri, to complete which he had to conduct the water from the Lake of Albano. Unlike most Italian gardens the plants and shrubs were not merely those of the south, but all that the culture of Holland and England could

contribute to fragrance and colour were also there, and the gorgeous tulips of the Hague, the golden ranunculus and crimson carnation, which attain their highest beauty in moister climates, here were varied with chrysanthemums and camelias. Gorgeous creepers trailed from tree to tree or gracefully trained themselves around the marble groups, and clusters of orange-trees, glittering with golden fruit, relieved in their darker green the almost too glaring brilliancy of colour.

At a window which opened to the ground—and from which a view of the garden, and beyond the garden the rich woods of the Borghese villa, and beyond these again, the massive Dome of St. Peter's, extended—sat two ladies, so wonderfully alike that a mere glance would have proclaimed them to be sisters. It is true the Countess Balderoni was several years older than Lady Augusta Bramleigh, but whether from temperament or the easier flow of an Italian life in comparison with the more wearing excitement of an English existence, she certainly looked little, if anything, her senior.

They were both handsome,—at least they had that character of good looks which in Italy is deemed

beauty,—they were singularly fair, with large deep-set blue-grey eyes, and light brown hair of a marvellous abundance and silkiest fibre. They were alike soft-voiced and gentle-mannered, and alike strong-willed and obstinate, of an intense selfishness, and very capricious.

"His eminence is late this evening," said Lady Augusta, looking at her watch. "It is nigh eight o'clock."

"I fancy, Gusta, he was not quite pleased with you last night. On going away he said something, I didn't exactly catch it, but it sounded like 'leggier-ezza;' he thought you had not treated his legends of St. Francis with becoming seriousness."

"If he wanted me to be grave he oughtn't to tell me funny stories."

"The lives of the saints, Gusta!"

"Well, dearest, that scene in the forest where St. Francis asked the devil to flog him, and not to desist even though he should be weak enough to implore it—wasn't that dialogue as droll as anything in Boccaccio?"

"It's not decent, it's not decorous, to laugh at any incident in the lives of holy men."

"Holy men then should never be funny, at least when they are presented to me, for it's always the absurd side of everything has the greatest attraction for me."

"This is certainly not the spirit which will lead you to the Church!"

"But I thought I told you already, dearest, that it's the road I like, not the end of the journey. Courtship is confessedly better than marriage, and the being converted is infinitely nicer than the state of conviction."

"Oh, Gusta, what are you saying?"

"Saying what I most fervently feel to be true. Don't you know better even than myself, that it is the zeal to rescue me from the fold of the heretics, surrounds me every evening with monsignori and vescovi, and attracts to the sofa where I happen to sit, purple stockings, and red, a class of adorers, I am free to own, there is nothing in the lay world to compare with; and don't you know too, that the work of conversion accomplished, these seductive saints will be on the look-out for a new sinner?"

"And is this the sincerity in which you profess your new faith? is it thus that you mean to endow a new edifice to the honour of the Holy Religion?"

"Cara mia! I want worship, homage, and adoration myself, and it is as absolute a necessity of my being, as if I had been born up there, and knew nothing of this base earth and its belongings. Be just, my dearest sister, and see for once the difference between us. You have a charming husband, who never plagues, never bores you, whom you see when it is pleasant to see, and dismiss when you are weary of him. He never worries you about money, he has no especial extravagance, and does not much trouble himself about anything,—I have none of these. I am married to a man almost double my age, taken from another class, and imbued with a whole set of notions different from my own. I can't live with *his* people; my own won't have me. What then is left but the refuge of that emotional existence which the Church offers,—a sort of pious flirtation with a runaway match in the distance, only it is to be Heaven, not Gretna Green."

"So that all this while you have never been serious, Gusta?"

"Most serious! I have actually written to my husband—you read the letter—acquainting him with my intended change of religion, and my desire to mark the sincerity of my profession by that most

signal of all proofs—a moneyed one. As I told the Cardinal last night, Heaven is never so sure of us as when we draw on our banker to go there!"

"How you must shock his eminence when you speak in this way."

"So he told me, but I must own he looked very tenderly into my eyes as he said so. Isn't it provoking?" said she, as she arose and moved out into the garden. "No post yet! It is always so, when one is on thorns for a letter. Now when one thinks that the mail arrives at daybreak, what can they possibly mean by not distributing the letters till evening? Did I tell you what I said to Monsignore Ricci, who has some function at the Post Office?"

"No, but I trust it was not a rude speech; he is always so polite."

"I said that as I was ever very impatient for my letters I had requested all my correspondents to write in a great round legible hand, which would give the authorities no pretext for delay, while deciphering their contents."

"I declare, Gusta, I am amazed at you. I cannot imagine how you can venture to say such things to persons in office."

"My dear sister, it is the only way they could ever hear them. There is no freedom of the press here; in society nobody speaks out. What would become of those people if they only heard the sort of stories they tell each other; besides, I'm going to be one of them. They must bear with a little indiscipline. The sergeant always pardons the recruit for being disorderly on the day of enlistment."

The countess shook her head disapprovingly and was silent.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sighed Lady Augusta. "I wonder what tidings the post will bring me. Will my affectionate and afflicted husband comply with my prayer, and be willing to endow the Church, and secure his own freedom; or, will he be sordid, and declare that he can't live without me? I know you'd laugh, dear, or I'd tell you that the man is actually violently in love with me. You've no notion of the difficulty I have to prevent him writing tender letters to me."

"You are too, too bad, I declare," said the other, smothering a rising laugh.

"Of course I'd not permit such a thing. I stand

on my dignity, and say, 'Have a care, sir.' Oh, here it comes! here's the post! What! only two letters after all? She's a dun! Madame La Ruelle, Place Vendôme—the cruellest creature that ever made a ball-dress. It is to tell me she can't wait; and I'm so sick of saying she must, that I'll not write any more. And who is this? The postmark is 'Portshannon.' Oh! I see; here's the name in the corner. This is from our eldest son, the future head of the house. Mr. Augustus Bramleigh is a bashful creature of about my own age, who was full of going to New Zealand and turning sheep-farmer. True, I assure you; he is an enthusiast about independence; which means he has a grand vocation for the workhouse."

"By what strange turn of events has he become your correspondent?"

"I should say, Dora, it looks ill as regards the money. I'm afraid that this bodes a refusal."

"Would not the shorter way be to read it?" said the other simply.

"Yes, the shorter but perhaps not the sweeter. There are little events in life which are worse than even uncertainties; but here goes:—

"Castello.

"'My dear Lady Augusta,—

("A very pretty beginning from my son—I mean my husband's son; and yet he could not have commenced 'Dearest Mamma.'")

"'I write my first letter to you at a very painful moment. My poor father was seized on Tuesday last with a most serious and sudden illness, to which the physician as yet hesitates to give a name. It is, however, on the brain or the membranes, and deprives him of all inclination, though not entirely of all power, to use his faculties. He is, moreover, enjoined to avoid every source of excitement, and even forbidden to converse. Of course, under these afflicting circumstances, everything which relates to business in any way is imperatively excluded from his knowledge; and must continue to be so till some change occurs.

"'It is not at such a moment you would expect to hear of a marriage in the family, and yet yesterday my sister Marion was married to Lord Viscount Culduff.'"

Here she laid down the letter, and stared with an

expression of almost overwhelmed amazement at her sister. "Lord Culduff! Where's the *Peerage*, Dora? Surely it must be the same who was at Dresden when we were children; he wasn't married —there can be no son. Oh, here he is: 'Henry Plantagenet de Lacey, fourteenth Viscount Culduff; born 9th February, 17—.' Last century. Why, he's the patriarch of the peers, and she's twenty-four! What can the girl mean?"

"Do read on; I'm impatient for more."

"'The imperative necessity for Lord Culduff to hold himself in readiness for whatever post in the diplomatic service the Minister might desire him to occupy, was the chief reason for the marriage taking place at this conjuncture. My father, however, himself was very anxious on the subject; and, indeed, insisted strongly on being present. The ceremony was accordingly performed in his own room, and I rejoice to say that, though naturally much excited, he does not appear to have sustained any increase of malady from this trying event. I need not tell you the great disparity of age between my sister and her husband: a disparity which I own enlisted me

amongst those who opposed the match. Marion, however, so firmly insisted on her right to choose for herself, and her fortune being completely at her own disposal, that all continued opposition would have been not alone unavailing for the present, but a source of coldness and estrangement for the future.

"'The Culduffs'—(how sweetly familiar)—'the Culduffs left this for Paris this day, where I believe they intend to remain till the question of Lord Culduff's post is determined on. My sister ardently hopes it may be in Italy, as she is mos desirous to be near you.'"

"Can you imagine such a horror as this woman playing daughter to me and yet going into dinner before me, and making me feel her rank on every possible occasion! All this here I see is business, nothing but business. The Colonel, it would seem, must have been breaking before they suspected, for all his late speculations have turned out ill. Penstyddin Copper Mine is an utter failure; the New Caledonian Packet Line a smash! and there's a whole list of crippled enterprises. It's very nice of Augustus, however, to say that though he mentions

these circumstances, which might possibly reach me through other channels, no event that he could contemplate should in any way affect my income, or any increase of it that I deem essential to my comfort or convenience; and although in total ignorance as he is of all transactions of the house, he begs me to write to himself directly when any question of increased expense should arise—which I certainly will. He's a *buon figliuolo*, Dolly—that must be said—and it would be shameful not to develope such generous instincts."

"'If my father's illness should be unhappily protracted, means must be taken, I believe, to devolve his share in business matters upon some other. I regret that it cannot possibly be upon myself; but I am totally unequal to the charge, and have not, besides, courage for the heavy responsibility.'"

"That's the whole of it," said she, with a sigh; "and all things considered, it might have been worse."

CHAPTER VII.

CASTELLO.

Castello had now become a very dreary abode. Lord and Lady Culduff had taken their departure for Paris. Temple had gone up to town to try and manage an exchange, if by good luck any one could be found to believe that Bogotà was a desirable residence, and a fine field for budding diplomacies; and none remained but Nelly and Augustus to relieve each other in watches beside their father's sick-bed.

Young and little experienced in life as she was, Nelly proved a great comfort and support to her brother in these trying hours. At first he told her nothing of the doubts and fears that beset him. In fact they had assumed no shape sufficiently palpable to convey.

It was his daily custom to go over the letters that each morning brought, and in a few words—

the very fewest he could employ—acquaint Mr. Underwood, the junior partner, of his father's precarious state, and protest against being able, in the slightest degree, to offer any views or guidance as to the conduct of matters of business. These would now and then bring replies in a tone that showed how little Underwood himself was acquainted with many of the transactions of the House, and how completely he was accustomed to submit himself to Colonel Bramleigh's guidance. Even in his affected retirement from business Bramleigh had not withdrawn from the direction of the weightiest of the matters which regarded the firm, and jealously refused any—the slightest—attempt of his partner to influence his judgment.

One of Underwood's letters completely puzzled Augustus: not only by the obscurity of its wording, but by the evident trace in it of the writer's own inability to explain his meaning. There was a passage which ran thus:—"Mr. Sedley was down again, and this time the amount is two thousand five hundred, and though I begged he would give me time to communicate with you before honouring so weighty a draft, he replied—I take pains to record

his exact words :—' There is no time for this ; I shall think myself very fortunate, and deem Colonel Bramleigh more fortunate still, if I am not forced to call upon you for four times as much within a fortnight.' " After referring to other matters, there was this at the end of the letter,—" S——has just repaid the amount he so lately drew from the bank ;—he appeared chagrined and out of spirits, merely saying, ' Tell the Colonel the negotiation has broke down, and that I will write to-morrow.' "

The promised letter from Sedley had not come, but in its place was a telegram from him, saying, " I find I must see and speak with you ; I shall go over by Saturday, and be with you on Sunday morning."

" Of course he cannot see papa," said Nelly ; " the doctor more strongly than ever insists on perfect repose."

" And it's little worth his while to make the journey to see *me*," said he dispiritedly.

" Perhaps he only wants your sanction, your concurrence, to something he thinks it wise to do, —who knows ? "

" Just so, Nelly ; who knows ? All these weighty

speculations entered upon to convert thousands into tens of thousands have no sympathy of mine. I see no object in such wealth. The accumulation of what never spares one a moment for its enjoyment, seems to me as foolish as the act of a man who would pass his life scaling a mountain to obtain a view, and drop down of fatigue before he had once enjoyed it. You and I, I take it, would be satisfied with far humbler fortune ?"

"You and I, Gusty," said she, laughingly, "are the ignoble members of this family."

"Then here comes another difficulty; Sedley will at once see that I have not shared my father's confidence, and he will be very cautious about telling me of matters which have not been entrusted to me already."

"Perhaps we are only worrying ourselves for nothing, Gusty. Perhaps there are no secrets after all; or at worst, only those trade secrets which are great mysteries in the counting-house, but have no interest for any not deep in speculation."

"If I only thought so!"

"Have you sufficient confidence in Mr. Cutbill to take him into your counsel? he will be back here to-morrow."

"Scarcely, Nelly. I do not exactly distrust, but I can't say that I like him."

"I hated him at first, but either I have got used to his vulgarity, or I fancy that he is really good-natured, or, from whatever the cause, I incline to like him better than when he came, and certainly he behaved well to poor Jack."

"Ah, there's another trouble that I have not thought of. Jack, who does not appear to know how ill my poor father is, asks if he could not be induced to write to—somebody,—I forget whom, in his behalf. In fact, Nelly, there is not a corner without its special difficulty, and I verily believe there never was a man less made to meet them than myself."

"I'll take as much of the load as I have strength for," said she, quietly.

"I know that; I know it well, Nelly. I can scarcely say what I'd do without you now. Here comes the doctor. I'm very anxious to hear what he'll say this evening."

"Belton had made a long visit to the sick-room, and his look was graver than usual as he came down the stairs. "His head is full of business; he will give his brain no respite," said he; "but for that,

I'd not call his case hopeless. Would it not be possible to let him suppose that all the important matters which weigh upon him were in safe hands and in good guidance?"

Augustus shook his head doubtingly.

"At least could he not be persuaded to suffer some one—yourself, for example—to take the control of such affairs as require prompt action till such time as he may be able to resume their management himself?"

"I doubt it, doctor; I doubt it much. Men who, like my father, have had to deal with vast and weighty interests, grow to feel that inexperienced people—of my own stamp, for instance—are but sorry substitutes in time of difficulty; and I have more than once heard him say, 'I'd rather lash the tiller and go below, than give over the helm to a bad steersman.'"

"I would begin," continued the doctor, "by forbidding him all access to his letters. You must have seen how nervous and excited he becomes as the hour of the post draws nigh. I think I shall take this responsibility on myself."

"I wish you would."

"He has given me in some degree the opportunity, for he has already asked when he might have strength enough to dictate a letter, and I have replied that I would be guided by the state in which I may find him to-morrow for the answer. My impression is that what he calls a letter is in reality a will. Are you aware whether he has yet made one?"

"I know nothing, absolutely nothing, of my father's affairs."

"The next twelve hours will decide much," said the doctor, as he moved away, and Augustus sat pondering alone over what he had said, and trying to work out in his mind whether his father's secrets involved anything deeper and more serious than the complications of business and the knotty combinations of weighty affairs.

Wearied out—for he had been up the greater part of the night—and fatigued, he fell off at last into a heavy sleep, from which he was awoke by Nelly, who, gently leaning on his shoulder, whispered, "Mr. Sedley has come, Gusty; he is at supper in the oak-parlour. I told him I thought you had gone to lie down for an hour, for I knew you were tired."

"No, not tired, Nelly," said he, arousing himself, half-ashamed of being caught asleep. "I came in here to think, and I believe I dropped into a doze. What is he like, this Mr. Sedley? What manner of man is he?"

"He is small and grey, with a slight stoop, and a formal sort of manner. I don't like him. I mean his manner checked and repelled me, and I was glad to get away from him."

"My father thinks highly of his integrity, I know."

"Yes, I am aware of that. He is an excellent person, I believe; rather non-attractive."

"Well," said he, with a half-sigh, "I'll go and see whether my impression of him be the same as yours. Will you come in, Nelly?"

"Not unless you particularly wish it," said she, gravely.

"No; I make no point of it, Nelly. I'll see you again by-and-by."

Augustus found Mr. Sedley over his wine. He had despatched a hasty meal, and was engaged looking over a mass of papers and letters with which a black leather-bag at his side seemed to be filled. After a few words of greeting, received by the visitor

with a formal politeness, Augustus proceeded to explain how his father's state precluded all questions of business, and that the injunctions of the doctor were positive on this head.

"His mind is clear, however, isn't it?" asked Sedley.

"Perfectly. He has never wandered, except in the few moments after sleep."

"I take it, I shall be permitted to see him?"

"Certainly; if the doctor makes no objection, you shall."

"And possibly, too, I may be allowed to ask him a question or two? Matters which I know he will be well prepared to answer me."

"I am not so confident about that. Within the last hour Doctor Belton has declared perfect quiet, perfect repose, to be of the utmost importance to my father."

"Is it not possible, Mr. Bramleigh, that I may be able to contribute to this state by setting your father's mind at rest, with reference to what may press very heavily on him?"

"That is more than I can answer," said Augustus, cautiously.

"Well," said Sedley, pushing back his chair from the table, "if I am not permitted to see Colonel Bramleigh, I shall have made this journey for nothing—without, sir, that you will consent to occupy your father's position, and give your sanction to a line of action?"

"You know my father, Mr. Sedley, and I need not tell you how so presumptuous a step on my part might be resented by him."

"Under ordinary circumstances I am sure he would resent such interference, but here, in the present critical emergency, he might feel—and not without reason, perhaps—more displeased at your want of decision."

"But when I tell you, Mr. Sedley, that I know nothing of business, that I know no more of the share list than I do of Sanscrit, that I never followed the rise and fall of the funds, and am as ignorant of what influences the exchanges as I am of what affects the tides; when I have told you all this, you will, I am sure, see that any opinion of mine must be utterly valueless.

"I don't exactly know, Mr. Bramleigh, that I'd have selected you if I wanted a guide to a great

speculation or a large investment; but the business which has brought me down here is not of this nature. It is besides a question as to which, in the common course of events, you might be obliged to determine what line you would adopt. After your father, you are the head of this family, and I think it is time you should learn that you may be called upon to-morrow or next day to defend your right, not only to your property, but to your name."

"For heaven's sake, what do you mean?"

"Be calm, sir, and grant me a patient hearing, and you shall hear the subject on which I have come to obtain your father's opinion, and failing that, yours—for, as I have said, Mr. Bramleigh, a day or two more may make the case one for your own decision. And now, without entering into the history of the affair, I will simply say that an old claim against your father's entailed estates has been recently revived, and under circumstances of increased importance; that I have been for some time back in negotiation to arrange this matter by a compromise, and with every hope of success; but that the negotiations have been unexpectedly broken off by the demands of the claimant—demands so

far above all calculation, and indeed I may say above all fairness—that I have come over to ask whether your father will accede to them or accept the issue of the law as to his right."

Augustus sat like one stunned by a heavy blow, not utterly unconscious, but so much overcome and so confused that he could not venture to utter a word.

"I see I have shocked you by my news, Mr. Bramleigh, but these are things not to be told by halves."

"I know nothing of all this; I never so much as heard of it," gasped out Augustus. "Tell me all that you know about it."

"That would be a somewhat long story," said the other, smiling, "but I can, in a short space, tell you enough to put the main facts before you, and enable you to see that the case is, with all its difficulties of proof, a very weighty and serious one, and not to be dismissed, as your father once opined, as the mere menace of a needy adventurer."

With as much brevity as the narrative permitted, Sedley told the story of Pracontal's claim. It was, he said, an old demand revived; but under circum-

stances that showed that the claimant had won over adherents to his cause, and that some men with means to bring the case to trial had espoused his side. Pracontal's father, added he, was easily dealt with; he was a vulgar fellow, of dissipated habits and wasteful ways; but his taste for plot and intrigue—very serious conspiracies, too, at times—had so much involved him that he was seldom able to show himself, and could only resort to letter-writing to press his demands. In fact, it was always his lot to be in hiding on this charge or that, and the police of half Europe were eager in pursuit of him. With a man so deeply compromised, almost outlawed over the whole Continent, it was not difficult to treat, and it happened more than once that he was for years without anything being heard of him; and, in fact, it was clear that he only preferred his claim as a means of raising a little money, when all other means of obtaining supplies had failed him. At last, news of his death arrived —he died at Monte Video—and it was at first believed that he had never married, and consequently that his claim, if it deserved such a name, died with him. It was only three years ago, that the demand

was revived, and this man, M. Anatole Pracontal as he called himself, using his maternal name, appeared in the field as the rightful owner of the Bramleigh estates.

"Now this man is a very different sort of person from his father. He has been well educated, mixed much with the world, and has the manners and bearing of a gentleman. I have not been able to learn much of his career; but I know that he served as a lieutenant in a French hussar regiment, and subsequently held some sort of employment in Egypt. He has never stooped to employ threat or menace, but frankly appealed to the law to establish his claim, and his solicitor, Kelson, of Furnival's Inn, is one of the most respectable men in the profession."

"You have seen this Monsieur Pracontal yourself?"

"Yes. By a strange accident, I met him at your brother's, Captain Bramleigh's, breakfast-table. They had been fellow-travellers, without the slightest suspicion on either side how eventful such a meeting might be. Your brother, of course, could know nothing of Pracontal's pretensions; but Pracontal,

when he came to know with whom he had been travelling, must have questioned himself closely as to what might have dropped from him inadvertently."

Augustus leaned his head on his hand in deep thought, and for several minutes was silent. At last he said,—"Give me your own opinion, Mr. Sedley—I don't mean your opinion as a lawyer, relying on nice technical questions or minute points of law, but simply your judgment as a man of sound sense, and, above all, of such integrity as I know you to possess—and tell me what do you think of this claim? Is it—in one word, is it founded on right?"

"You are asking too much of me, Mr. Bramleigh. First of all, you ask me to disassociate myself from all the habits and instincts of my daily life, and give you an opinion on a matter of law, based on other rules of evidence than those which alone I suffer myself to be guided by. I only recognize one kind of right, that which the law declares and decrees."

"Is there not such a thing as a moral right?"

"There may be; but we are disputatious enough in this world, with all our artificial aids to some fixity of judgment, and for heaven's sake let us not soar up

to the realms of morality for our decisions, or we shall bid adieu to guidance for ever."

"I'm not of your mind there, sir. I think it is quite possible to conceive a case in which there could be no doubt on which side lay the right, and not difficult to believe that there are men who would act, on conviction, to their own certain detriment."

"It's a very hopeful view of humanity, Mr. Bramleigh," said the lawyer, and he took a pinch of snuff.

"I am certain it is a just one. At least, I will go this far to sustain my opinion. I will declare to you here, that if the time should ever come that it may depend upon me to decide this matter, if I satisfy my mind that M. Pracontal's claim be just and equitable—that, in fact, he is simply asking for his own—I'll not screen myself behind the law's delays or its niceties; I'll not make it a question of the longest purse or the ablest advocate, but frankly admit that the property is his, and cede it to him."

"I have only one remark to make, Mr. Bramleigh, which is, Keep this determination strictly to yourself, and, above all things, do not acquaint Colonel Bramleigh with these opinions."

"I suspect that my father is not a stranger to

them," said Augustus, reddening with shame and irritation together.

"It is therefore as well, sir, that there is no question of a compromise to lay before you. You are for strict justice and no favour."

"I repeat, Mr. Sedley, I am for him who has the right."

"So am I," quickly responded Sedley; "and we alone differ about the meaning of that word; but let me ask another question. Are you aware that this claim extends to nearly everything you have in the world: that the interest alone on the debt would certainly swallow up all your funded property, and make a great inroad besides on your securities and foreign bonds?"

"I can well believe it," said the other, mournfully.

"I must say, sir," said Sedley, as he rose and proceeded to thrust the papers hurriedly into his bag, "that though I am highly impressed—very highly impressed, indeed, with the noble sentiments you have delivered on this occasion—sentiments, I am bound to admit, that a long professional career has never made me acquainted with till this day—yet,

on the whole, Mr. Bramleigh, looking at the question with a view to its remote consequences, and speculating on what would result if such opinions as yours were to meet a general acceptance, I am bound to say I prefer the verdict of twelve men in a jury-box to the most impartial judgment of any individual breathing; and I wish you a very good-night."

What Mr. Sedley muttered to himself as he ascended the stairs, in what spirit he canvassed the character of Mr. Augustus Bramleigh, the reader need not know; and it is fully as well that our story does not require it should be recorded. One only remark, however, may be preserved: it was said as he reached the door of his room, and apparently in a sort of summing up of all that had occurred to him, —"These creatures, with their cant about conscience, don't seem to know that this mischievous folly would unsettle half the estates in the kingdom; and there's not a man in England would know what he was born to, till he had got his father in a madhouse."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HÔTEL BRISTOL.

In a handsome apartment of the Hôtel Bristol at Paris sat Lord and Lady Culduff, at tea. They were in deep mourning; and though they were perfectly alone, the room was splendidly lighted,—branches of candles figuring on every console, and the glass lustre that hung from the ceiling a blaze of waxlights.

If Lord Culduff looked older and more careworn than we have lately seen him, Marion seemed in higher bloom and beauty, and the haughty, half-defiant air which had, in a measure, spoiled the charm of her girlhood, sat with a sort of dignity on her features as a woman.

Not a word was spoken on either side; and from her look of intense preoccupation, as she sat gazing on the broad hem of her handkerchief, it was evident

that her thoughts were wandering far away from the place she was in. As they sat thus, the door was noiselessly opened by a servant in deep black, who, in a very subdued voice, said, "The Duke de Castro, your Excellency."

"I don't receive," was the cold reply, and the man withdrew. In about a quarter of an hour after he reappeared, and in the same stealthy tone said, "Madame la Comtesse de Renneville begs she may have the honour——"

"Lady Culduff does not receive," said his lordship, sternly.

"The countess has been very kind; she has been here to inquire after me several times."

"She is a woman of intense curiosity," said he slowly.

"I'd have said of great good nature."

"And you'd have said perfectly wrong, madam. The woman is a political 'intriguante,' who only lives to unravel mysteries; and the one that is now puzzling her is too much for her good manners."

"I declare, my lord, that I do not follow you."

"I'm quite sure of that, madam. The sort of address Madame de Renneville boasts was not a

quality that your life in Ireland was likely to make you familiar with."

"I'd beg you to remember, my lord," said she, angrily, "that all my experiences of the world have not been derived from that side of the Channel."

"I'm cruel enough to say, madam, that I wish they had! There is nothing so difficult as unlearning."

"I wish, my lord—I heartily wish—that you had made this discovery earlier."

"Madam," said he, slowly, and with much solemnity of manner, "I owe it to each of us to own that I had made what you are pleased to call this 'discovery' while there was yet time to obviate its consequences. My very great admiration had not blinded me as to certain peculiarities, let me call them, of manner; and if my vanity induced me to believe that I should be able to correct them, it is my only error."

"I protest, my lord, if my temper sustain me under such insult as this, I think I might be acquitted of ill breeding."

"I live in the hope, madam, that such a charge would be impossible."

"I suppose you mean," said she, with a sneering smile, "when I have taken more lessons,—when I have completed the course of instruction you so courteously began with me yesterday?"

"Precisely, madam, precisely. There are no heaven-born courtiers. The graces of manner are as much matter of acquirement as are the notes in music. A delicate organization has the same disadvantage in the one case that a fine ear has in the other. It substitutes an aptitude for what ought to be pure acquirement. The people who are naturally well mannered are like the people who sing by ear; and I need not say what inflictions are both."

"And you really think, my lord, that I may yet be able to enter a room and leave it with becoming grace and dignity?"

"You enter a room well, madam," said he, with a judicial slowness. "Now that you have subdued the triumphant air I objected to, and assumed more quietness,—the blended softness with reserve,—your approach is good, I should say, extremely good. To withdraw is, however, far more difficult. To throw into the deference of leave-taking,—for it is always a

permission you seem to ask,—the tempered sorrow of departure with the sense of tasted enjoyment, to do this with ease and with elegance, and not a touch of the dramatic about it, is a very high success; and I grieve to say, madam," added he, seriously, "it is a success not yet accorded you. Would you do me the great favour to repeat our lesson of this morning—I mean the curtsey with the two steps retiring, and then the slide?"

"If you do not think me well mannered, my lord, you must at least believe me very good-tempered," said she, flushing.

"Let me assure you, my lady, that to the latter quality I attach no importance whatever. Persons who respect themselves never visit peculiarities of temperament on others. We have our infirmities of nature, as we have our maladies; but we keep them for ourselves, or for our doctor. It is the triumph of the well-bred world to need nothing but good manners."

"What charming people. I take it that heaven must be peopled with lords-in-waiting."

"Let me observe to your ladyship that there is no greater enormity in manners than an epigram.

Keep this smartness for correspondence exclusively, abstain from it strictly in conversation."

"I protest, my lord, your lessons come so thick that I despair of being able to profit by half of them. Meanwhile, if I am not committing another solecism against good manners, I should like to say good night."

Lord Culduff arose and walked to the door, to be ready to open it as she approached. Meanwhile, she busied herself collecting her fan and her scent-bottle and her handkerchief, and a book she had been reading.

"Hadn't Virginie better come for these things?" said he quietly.

"Oh, certainly," replied she, dropping them hurriedly on the table; "I'm always transgressing; but I do hope, my lord, with time, and with that sincere desire to learn that animates me, I may yet attain to at least so many of the habits of your lordship's order as may enable me to escape censure."

He smiled and bowed a courteous concurrence with the wish, but did not speak. Though her lip now trembled with indignation, and her cheek was

flushed, she controlled her temper, and as she drew nigh the door dropped a low and most respectful curtsey.

"Very nice, very nice, indeed; a thought, perhaps, too formal,—I mean for the occasion,—but in admirable taste. Your ladyship is grace itself."

"My lord, you are a model of courtesy."

"I cannot even attempt to convey what pleasure your words give me," said he, pressing her hand to his heart and bowing low. Meanwhile, with a darkening brow and a look of haughty defiance, she swept past him and left the room.

"Isn't Marion well?" said Temple Bramleigh, as he entered a few minutes later; "her maid told me she had gone to her room."

"Quite well: a little fagged, perhaps, by a day of visiting; nothing beyond that. You have been dining at the embassy? Whom had you there?"

"A family party and a few of the smaller diplomacies."

"To be sure. It was Friday. Any news stirring?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Does Bartleton talk of retiring still?"

"Yes. He says he is sick of sending in his demand for retirement. That they always say, 'We can't spare you; you must hold on a little longer. If you go out now, there's Bailey and Hammersmith, and half-a-dozen others will come insisting on advancement.'"

"Didn't he say Culduff too? eh, didn't he?" said the old lord, with a wicked twinkle of the eye.

"I'm not sure he didn't," said Temple, blushing.

"He did, sir, and he said more—he said, Rather than see Culduff here, I'd stay on and serve these twenty years."

"I didn't hear him say that, certainly."

"No, sir, perhaps not, but he said it to himself, as sure as I stand here. There isn't a country in Europe—I say it advisedly—where intellect—I mean superior intellect—is so persistently persecuted as in England. I don't want my enemy to have any heavier misfortune than to be born a man of brains and a Briton! Once that it's known that you stand above your fellow-men, the whole world is arrayed against you. Who knows that better than he who now speaks to you? Have I ever been forgiven the

Erzeroum convention? Even George Canning—from whom one might have expected better—even he used to say, 'How well Culduff managed that commercial treaty with the Hanse Towns:' he never got over it, sir, never! You are a young fellow entering upon life—let me give you a word of counsel. Always be inferior to the man you are, for the time being, in contact with. Outbid him, outjockey him, overreach him, but never forget to make him believe he knows more of the game than you do. If you have any success over him, ascribe it to 'luck,' mere 'luck.' The most envious of men will forgive 'luck,' all the more if they despise the fellow who has profited by it. Therefore, I say, if the intellectual standard of your rival is only four feet, take care that with your tallest heels on, you don't stand above three feet eleven! No harm if only three ten and a half."

The little applauding ha! ha! ha! with which his lordship ended, was faintly chorussed by the secretary.

"And what is your news from home; you've had letters, haven't you?"

"Yes. Augustus writes me in great confusion. They have not found the will, and they begin to fear

that the very informal scrap of paper I already mentioned is all that represents one."

"What! do you mean that memorandum stating that your father bequeathed all he had to Augustus, and trusted he would make a suitable provision for his brothers and sisters?"

"Yes; that is all that has been found. Augustus says in his last letter, my poor father would seem to have been most painfully affected for some time back by a claim put forward to the title of all his landed property, by a person assuming to be the heir of my grandfather, and this claim is actually about to be asserted at law. The weight of this charge and all its consequent publicity and exposure appear to have crushed him for some months before his death, and he had made great efforts to effect a compromise."

A long, low, plaintive whistle from Lord Culduff arrested Temple's speech, and for a few seconds there was a dead silence in the room.

"This, then, would have left you all ruined—eh?" asked Culduff, after a pause.

"I don't exactly see to what extent we should have been liable,—whether only the estated property, or also all funded moneys."

"Everything; every stick and stone; every scrip and debenture, you may swear. The rental of the estates for years back would have to be accounted for —with interest."

"Sedley does not say so," said Temple, in a tone of considerable irritation.

"These fellows never do; they always imply there is a game to be played, an issue to be waited for, else their occupation were gone. How much of all this story was known to your sister Marion?"

"Nothing. Neither she nor any of us ever suspected it."

"It's always the same thing," said the viscount, as he arose and settled his wig before the glass. "The same episode goes on repeating itself for ever. These trade fortunes are just card-houses; they are raised in a night, and blown away in the morning."

"You forget, my lord, that my father inherited an entailed estate."

"Which turns out not to have been his," replied he, with a grin.

"You are going too fast, my lord, faster than judge and jury. Sedley never took a very serious view of this claim, and he only concurred in the attempt to

compromise it out of deference to my father's dislike to public scandal."

"And a very wise antipathy it was, I must say. No gentleman ever consulted his self-respect by inviting the world to criticize his private affairs. And how does this pleasing incident stand now? In which act of the drama are we at this moment? Is there an action at law or are we in the stage of compromise?"

"This is what Augustus says," said Temple, taking the letter from his pocket and reading: "'Sedley thinks that a handsome offer of a sum down,—say twenty thousand pounds,—might possibly be accepted; but to meet this would require a united effort by all of us. Would Lord Culduff be disposed to accept his share in this liability? Would he, I mean, be willing to devote a portion of Marion's fortune to this object, seeing that he is now one of us? I have engaged Cutbill to go over to Paris and confer with him, and he will probably arrive there by Tuesday. Nelly has placed at my disposal the only sum over which she has exclusive control,—it is but two thousand pounds. As for Jack, matters have gone very ill with him, and rather than accept a court-martial, he has thrown up his commission and left the

service. We are expecting him here to-night, but only to say good-by, as he sails for China on Thursday.'"

Lord Culduff walked quietly towards the chimney-piece as Temple concluded, and took up a small tobacco-box of chased silver, from which he proceeded to manufacture a cigarette—a process on which he displayed considerable skill and patience; having lighted which, and taken a couple of puffs, he said, "You'll have to go to Bogotà, Temple, that's clear."

"Go to Bogotà! I declare I don't see why."

"Yes, you'll have to go; every man has to take his turn of some objectionable post, his Gaboon and yellow fever-days. I myself passed a year at Stuttgard. The Bramleighs are now events of the past. There's no use in fighting against these things. They were, and they are not: that's the whole story. It's very hard on every one, especially hard upon *me*. Reverses in life sit easily enough on the class that furnishes adventurers, but in *my* condition there are no adventurers. You and others like you descend to the ranks, and nobody thinks the worse of you. *We*,—we cannot! that's the pull you have. We are born with our epaulettes, and we must wear them till we die."

"It does not seem a very logical consequence, notwithstanding, to me, that because my brother may have to defend his title to his estate, that I must accept a post that is highly distasteful to me."

"And yet it is the direct consequence. Will you do me the favour to touch that bell. I should like some claret-cup. The fact is, we all of us take too little out of our prosperity! Where we err is, we experiment on good fortune: now we shouldn't do that, we should realize. You, for instance, ought to have made your 'running' while your father was entertaining all the world in Belgravia. The people couldn't have ignored *you*, and dined with *him;* at least, you need not have let them."

"So that your lordship already looks upon us as bygones, as things of the past?"

"I am forced to take this very disagreeable view. Will you try that cup? it is scarcely iced enough for my liking. Have you remarked that they never make cup properly in an hotel? The clubs alone have the secret."

"I suppose you will confer with Cutbill before you return an answer to Augustus?" said Temple stiffly.

"I may—that is, I may listen to what that very plausible but not very polished individual has to say, before I frame the exact terms of my reply. We are all of us, so to say, *dans des mauvais draps*. *You* are going where you hate to go, and I, who really should have had no share in this general disaster, have taken my ticket in the lottery when the last prize has just been paid over the counter."

"It is very hard on you indeed," said the other scornfully.

"Nothing less than your sympathy would make it endurable," and as he spoke he lighted a bed-room candle and moved towards the door. "Don't tell them at F. O. that you are going out unwillingly, or they'll keep you there. Trust to some irregularity when you are there, to get recalled, and be injured. If a man can only be injured and brought before the House, it's worth ten years' active service to him. The first time I was injured I was made secretary of embassy. The second gave me my K. C. B., and I look to my next misfortune for the Grand Cross. Good-by. Don't take the yellow fever, don't marry a squaw." And with a graceful move of the hand he motioned an adieu, and disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE ROAD.

L'Estrange and his sister were on their way to Italy. The curate had been appointed to the church at Albano, and he was proceeding to his destination with as much happiness as is permitted to a man who, with a very humble opinion of himself, feels called on to assume a position of some importance.

Wishing, partly from motives of enjoyment, partly from economy, to avoid the route most frequented by travellers, they had taken the road through Zurich and the valley of the upper Rhine, and had now reached the little village of Dornbirn in the Vorarlberg —a spot of singular beauty, in the midst of a completely pastoral country. High mountains, snow-capped above, pine-clad lower down, descended by grassy slopes into rich pasture-lands, traversed by innumerable streams, and dotted over with those

cottages of framed wood, which, with their ornamented gables and quaint galleries, are the most picturesque peasant-houses in existence. Beautiful cattle covered the hills, their tinkling bells ringing out in the clear air, and blending their tones with the ceaseless flow of falling water, imparting just that amount of sound that relieved the solemn character of the scene, and gave it vitality.

Day after day found our two travellers still lingering here. There was a charm in the spot, which each felt, without confessing it to the other, and it was already the fourth evening of their sojourn as they were sitting by the side of a little rivulet, watching the dipping flies along the stream, that Julia said, suddenly,—

"You'd like to live your life here, George; isn't that so?"

"What makes you think so, Julia?" said he, colouring slightly as he spoke.

"First tell me if I have not read you aright? You like this quiet dreamy landscape. You want no other changes than in the varying effects of cloud, and shadow, and mist; and you'd like to think this a little haven against the storms and shipwrecks of life?"

"And if I really did think all this, would my choice of an existence be a very bad one, Julia?"

"No. Not if one could ensure the same frame of mind in which first he tasted the enjoyment. I, for instance, like what is called the world very much. I like society, life, and gaiety. I like the attentions, I like the flatteries one meets with, but if I could be always as happy, always as tranquil as we have felt since we came here, I'd be quite willing to sign a bond to live and die here."

"So that you mean our present enjoyment of the place could not last."

"I am sure it could not. I am sure a great deal of the pleasure we now feel is in the relief of escaping from the turmoil and bustle of a world that we don't belong to. The first sense of this relief is repose, the next would be ennui."

"I don't agree with you, Julia. There is a calm acceptance of a humble lot in life, quite apart from ennui."

"Don't believe it. There is no such philosophy. A great part of your happiness here is in the fact that you can afford to live here. Oh, hold up your hands, and be horrified. It is very shocking to have

a sister who will say such vulgar things, but I watched you, George, after you paid the bill this morning, and I marked the delighted smile in which you pointed out some effect of light on the 'Sentis,' and I said to myself, 'It is the landlord has touched up the landscape.'"

"I declare, Julia, you make me angry. Why will you say such things?"

"Why are we so poor, George? Tell me that, brother mine. Why are we so poor?"

"There are hundreds as poor; thousands poorer."

"Perhaps they don't care, don't fret about it, don't dwell on all the things they are debarred from, don't want this or that appliance to make life easier. Now look there, what a difference in one's existence to travel that way."

As she spoke, she pointed to a travelling carriage which swept over the bridge, with all the speed of four posters, and, with all the clatter of cracking whips and sounding horns, made for the inn of the village.

"How few travel with post now, in these days of railroad," said he, not sorry to turn the conversation into another channel.

"I hope they are going on. I trust they'll not stop here. We have been the great folk of the place up to this, but you'll see how completely the courier or the femme-de-chambre will eclipse us now," said she, rising. "Let us go back, or perhaps they'll give our very rooms away."

"How can you be so silly, Julia?"

"All because we are poor, George. Let me be rich, and you'll be surprised, not only how generous I shall be, but how disposed to think well of every one. Poverty is the very mother of distrust."

"I never heard you rail at our narrow fortune like this before."

"Don't be angry with me, dear George, and I'll make a confession to you. I was not thinking of ourselves, nor of our humble lot all this while; it was a letter I got this morning from Nelly Bramleigh was running in my mind. It has never been out of my thoughts since I received it."

"You never told me of this."

"No. She begged of me not to speak of it; and I meant to have obeyed her, but my temper has betrayed me. What Nelly said was, 'Don't tell your

brother about these things till he can hear the whole story, which Augustus will write to him as soon as he is able.' "

"What does she allude to?"

"They are ruined—actually ruined."

"The Bramleighs—the rich Bramleighs?"

"Just so. They were worth millions—at least they thought so—a few weeks back, and now they have next to nothing."

"This has come of over-speculation."

"No. Nothing of the kind. It is a claimant to the estate has arisen, an heir whose rights take precedence of their father's; in fact, the grandfather had been privately married early in life, and had a son of whom nothing was heard for years, but who married and left a boy, who, on attaining manhood, preferred his claim to the property. All this mysterious claim was well known to Colonel Bramleigh; indeed, it would appear that for years he was engaged in negotiations with this man's lawyers, sometimes defiantly challenging an appeal to the law, and sometimes entertaining projects of compromise. The correspondence was very lengthy, and, from its nature, must have weighed heavily on the Colonel's

mind and spirits, and ended, as Nelly suspects, by breaking up his health.

"It was almost the very first news that met Augustus on his accession to his fortune, and so stunned was he that he wrote to Mr. Sedley to say, —'I have such perfect reliance on both your integrity and ability, that if you assure me this claim is well founded and this demand a just one, I will not contest it.' He added,—'I am not afraid of poverty, but a public shame and a scandal would be my death.'"

"Just what I should expect from him. What did Sedley say?"

"He didn't say he was exactly a fool, but something very like it; and he told him, too, that though he might make very light of his own rights, he could not presume to barter away those of others; and, last of all, he added, what he knew would have its weight with Augustus, that, had his father lived, he meant to have compromised this claim. Not that he regarded it either as well founded or formidable, but simply as a means of avoiding a very unpleasant publicity. This last intimation had its effect, and Augustus permitted Sedley to treat. Sedley at once

addressed himself to Temple—Jack was not to be found—and to Lord Culduff, to learn what share they were disposed to take in such an arrangement. As Augustus offered to bind himself never to marry, and to make a will dividing the estate equally amongst his brothers and sisters, Lord Culduff and Temple quite approved of this determination, but held that they were not called upon to take any portion of the burden of the compromise.

"Augustus would seem to have been so indignant at this conduct, that he wrote to Sedley to put him at once in direct communication with the claimant. Sedley saw by the terms of the letter how much of it was dictated by passion and offended pride, evaded the demand, and pretended that an arrangement was actually pending, and, if uninterfered with, sure to be completed. To this Augustus replied—for Nelly has sent me a copy of his very words—'Be it so. Make such a settlement as you, in your capacity of my lawyer, deem best for my interests. For my own part, I will not live in a house, nor receive the rents of an estate, my rights to which the law may possibly decide against me. Till, then, the matter be determined either way, I

and my sister Eleanor, who is like-minded with me in this affair, will go where we can live at least cost, decided, so soon as may be, to have this issue determined, and Castello become the possession of him who rightfully owns it.'

"On the evening of the day he wrote this they left Castello. They only stopped a night in Dublin, and left next morning for the Continent. Nelly's letter is dated from Ostend. She says she does not know where they are going, and is averse to anything like importuning her brother by even a question. She promises to write soon again, however, and tell me all about their plans. They are travelling without a servant, and, so far as she knows, with very little money. Poor Nelly! she bears up nobly, but the terrible reverse of condition, and the privations she is hourly confronted with, are clearly preying upon her."

"What a change! Just to think of them a few months back. It was a princely household."

"Just what Nelly says. 'It is complete overthrow; and if I am not stunned by the reverse, it is because all my sympathies are engaged for poor Gusty, who is doing his best to bear up well. As

for myself, I never knew how helpless I was till I tried to pack my trunk. I suppose time will soften down many things that are now somewhat hard to bear; but for the moment I am impatient and irritable; and it is only the sight of my dear brother—so calm, so manly, and so dignified in his sorrow—that obliges me to forget my selfish grief and compose myself as I ought.'"

As they thus talked, they arrived at the door of the inn, where the landlord met them, with the request that the two gentlemen, who had arrived by extra-post, and who could not find horses to proceed on their journey, might be permitted to share the one sitting-room the house contained, and which was at present occupied by the L'Estranges.

"Let us sup in your room, George," whispered Julia, and passed on into the house. L'Estrange gave orders to send the supper to his room, and told the landlord that the salon was at his guests' disposal.

About two hours later, as the curate and his sister sat at the open window, silently enjoying the delicious softness of a starry night, they were startled by the loud talking of persons so near as to seem almost in the room with them.

"English—I'll be sworn they are!" said one. "That instinctive dread of a stranger pertains only to our people. How could it have interfered with their comfort, that we sat and ate our meal in this corner?"

"The landlord says they are young, and the woman pretty. That may explain something. Your countrymen, Philip, are the most jealous race in Europe."

L'Estrange coughed here three or four times, to apprise his neighbours that they were within earshot of others.

"Listen to that cough," cried the first speaker. "That was palpably feigned. It was meant to say, Don't talk so loud."

"I always grow more indiscreet under such provocation," said the other, whose words were slightly tinged with a foreign accent.

A merry laugh burst from Julia at this speech, which the others joined in by very impulse.

"I suspect," said the first speaker, "we might as well have occupied the same room, seeing in what close proximity we stand to each other."

"I think it would be as well to go to your room,

Julia," said George, in a low voice. "It is getting late, besides."

"I believe you are right, George. I will say good-night."

The last words appeared to have caught the ears of the strangers, who exclaimed together, "Good-night, good-night;" and he with the foreign accent began to hum, in a very sweet tenor voice, "Buona sera, buona notte, buona sera;" which Julia would fain have listened to, but George hurried her away, and closed the door.

"There is the end of that episode," said the foreign voice. "Le Mari Jaloux has had enough of us. Your women in England are taught never to play with fire."

"I might reply that yours are all pyrotechnists," said the other, with a laugh.

The clatter of plates and the jingle of glasses, as the waiter laid the table for supper, drowned their voices, and L'Estrange dropped off asleep soon after. A hearty burst of laughter at last aroused him. It came from the adjoining room, where the strangers were still at table, though it was now nigh daybreak.

"Yes," said he of the foreign accent, "I must

confess it. I never made a lucky hit in my life without the ungrateful thought of how much luckier it might have been."

"It is your Italian blood has given you that temperament."

"I knew you'd say so, Philip; before my speech was well out, I felt the reply you'd make me. But let me tell you that you English are not a whit more thankful to fortune than we are; but in your matter-of-fact way you accept a benefit as your just due, while we, more conscious of our deservings, always feel that no recompence fully equalled what we merited. And so it is that ever since that morning at Furnival's Inn, I keep on asking myself, Why twenty thousand? Why not forty—why not twice forty?"

"I was quite prepared for all this. I think I saw the reaction beginning as you signed the paper."

"No, there you wrong me, Philip. I wrote boldly, like a man who felt that he was making a great resolve, and could stand by it. You'd never guess when what you have called 'the reaction' set in."

"I am curious to know when that was."

"I'll tell you. You remember our visit to Cas-

tello. You thought it a strange caprice of mine to ask the lawyer whether, now that all was finally settled between us, I might be permitted to see the house—which, as the family had left, could be done without any unpleasantness. I believe my request amused *him* as much as it did *you;* he thought it a strange caprice, but he saw no reason to refuse it, and I saw smiled as he sat down to write the note to the housekeeper. I have no doubt that he thought, 'It is a gambler's whim; he wants to see the stake he played for, and what he might perhaps have won had he had courage to play out the game.' *You* certainly took that view of it."

The other muttered something like a half assent, and the former speaker continued: "And you were both of you wrong. I wanted to see the finished picture of which I possessed the sketch—the beautiful Flora—whose original was my grandmother. I cannot tell you the intense longing I had to see the features that pertained to one who belonged to me; a man must be as utterly desolate as I am, to comprehend the craving I felt to have something—anything that might stand to me in place of family. It was this led me to Castello, and it was this that made me,

when I crossed the threshold, indifferent to all the splendours of the place, and only occupied with one thought, one wish—to see the fresco in the Octagon Tower,—poor old Giacomo's great work,—the picture of his beautiful daughter. And was she not beautiful? I ask you, Philip, had Raphael himself ever such a model for sweetness of expression? Come, come. You were just as wild as myself in your enthusiasm as you stood before her; and it was only by a silly jest that you could repress the agitation you were so ashamed of."

"I remember I told you that the family had terribly degenerated since her day."

"And yet you tried to trace a likeness between us."

"You won't say that I succeeded," said he, with a laugh.

"It was then as I stood there gazing on her, thinking of her sad story, that I bethought me what an ignoble part it was I played to compromise the rights that she had won, and how unworthy I was to be the descendant of the beautiful Enrichetta."

"You are about the only man I ever met who was in love with his grandmother."

"Call it how you like, her lovely face has never left me since I saw it there."

"And yet your regret implies that you are only sorry not to have made a better bargain."

"No, Philip: my regret is not to have stood out for terms that must have been refused me; I wish I had asked for the 'impossible.' I tried to make a laughing matter of it when I began, but I cannot—I cannot. I have got the feeling that I have been selling my birthright."

"And you regret that the mess of pottage has not been bigger."

"There's the impossibility in making a friend of an Englishman! It is the sordid side of everything he will insist on turning uppermost. Had I told a Frenchman what I have told you, he would have lent me his whole heart in sympathy."

"To be sure he would. He would have accepted all that stupid sentimentality about your grandmother as refined feeling, and you'd have been blubbering over each other this half hour."

"If you only knew the sublime project I had. I dare not tell you of it in your miserable spirit of depreciating all that is high in feeling and noble in

aspiration. You would ridicule it. Yes, mon cher, you would have seen nothing in my plan, save what you could turn into absurdity."

"Let me hear it. I promise you to receive the information with the most distinguished consideration."

"You could not. You could not elevate your mind even to comprehend my motives. What would you have said, if I had gone to this Mr. Bramleigh, and said, Cousin——"

"He is not your cousin, to begin with."

"No matter; one calls every undefined relation cousin. Cousin, I would have said, this house that you live in, these horses that you drive, this plate that you dine off, these spreading lawns and shady woods that lie around, are mine; I am their lawful owner; I am the true heir to them; and you are nothing—nobody—the son of an illegitimate——"

"I'd say he'd have pitched you out of the window."

"Wait a while; not so fast. Nevertheless, I would have said, Yours is the prescription and the habit. These things have pertained to you since your birth: they are part of you, and you of them.

You cannot live without them, because you know no other life than where they enter and mingle; while I, poor and an adventurer, have never tasted luxury, nor had any experiences but of trouble and difficulty. Let us each keep the station to which habit and time have accustomed him. Do you live, as you have ever lived, grand seigneur as you are—rich, honoured, and regarded. I will never dispute your possession nor assail your right. I only ask that you accept me as your relation,—a cousin, who has been long absent in remote lands; a traveller, an 'eccentric,' who likes a life of savagery and adventure, and who has come back, after years of exile, to see his family and be with his own. Imagine yourself for an instant to be Bramleigh, and what would you have said to this? Had I simply asked to be one of them, to call them by their Christian names, to be presented to their friends as Cousin Anatole—I ask you now—seriously, what you would have replied to such a noble appeal?"

"I don't know exactly what I should have said, but I think I can tell you what I would have done."

"Well, out with it."

"I'd have sent for the police, and handed you over to the authorities for either a rogue or a madman."

"Bon soir. I wish you a good-night—pleasant dreams, too, if that be possible."

"Don't go. Sit down. The dawn is just breaking, and you know I ordered the horses for the first light."

"I must go into the air then. I must go where I can breathe."

"Take a cigar, and let us talk of something else."

"That is easy enough for *you;* you who treat everything as a mere passing incident, and would make life a series of unconnected episodes. You turn from this to that, just as you taste of this dish and that at dinner; but I who want to live a life—*entends-tu?*—to live a life: to be to-morrow the successor of myself to-day, to carry with me an identity—how am *I* to practise your philosophy?"

"Here come the horses; and I must say, I am for once grateful to their jingling bells, helping as they do to drown more nonsense than even you usually give way to."

"How did we ever become friends? Can you explain that to me?"

"I suppose it must have been in one of your lucid moments, Anatole—for you have them at times."

"Ah, I have! But if you're getting complimentary, I'd better be off. Will you look to the bill? and I'll take charge of the baggage."

CHAPTER X.

ON THE ROAD TO ITALY.

"You'd not guess who our neighbours of last night were, Julia," said L'Estrange as they sat at breakfast the next morning.

"I need not guess, for I know," said she, laughing. "The fact is, George, my curiosity was so excited to see them that I got up as they were about to start, and though the grey morning was only breaking at the time, there was light enough for me to recognize Mr. Longworth and his French friend, Count Pracontal."

"I know that; but I know more than that, Julia. What do you think of my discovery, when I tell you that this same Count Pracontal is the claimant of the Bramleigh estate?"

"Is it possible?"

"It is beyond a question or a doubt. I was

awakened from my sleep last night by their loud talking, and unwittingly made a listener to all they said. I heard the Frenchman deplore how he had ever consented to a compromise of his claim, and then Longworth quizzed him a good deal, and attributed the regret to his not having made a harder bargain. My own conviction is that the man really felt it as a point of honour, and was ashamed at having stooped to accept less than his right."

"So then they have made a compromise, and the Bramleighs are safe?" cried she eagerly.

"That much seems certain. The count even spoke of the sum he had received. I did not pay much attention to the amount, but I remember it struck me as being considerable; and he also referred to his having signed some document debarring him, as it seemed, from all renewal of his demand. In a word, as you said just now, the Bramleighs are safe, and the storm that threatened their fate has passed off harmlessly."

"Oh, you have made me so happy, George. I cannot tell you what joy this news is to me. Poor Nelly in all her sorrow and privation has never been out of my thoughts since I read her letter."

"I have not told you the strangest part of all—at least so it certainly seemed to me. This Count Pracontal actually regretted the compromise, as depriving him of a noble opportunity of self-sacrifice. He wished, he said, he could have gone to Augustus Bramleigh, and declared, 'I want none of this wealth. These luxuries and this station are all essential to you, who have been born to them, and regard them as part of your very existence. To me they are no wants—I never knew them. Keep them, therefore, as your own. All I ask is, that you regard me as one of your kindred and your family. Call me cousin—let me be one of you—to come here, under your roof, when fortune goes ill with me.' When he was saying this, Longworth burst out into a coarse laugh, and told him, that if he talked such rotten sentimentality to any sane Englishman, the only impression it would have left would be that he was a consummate knave or an idiot."

"Well, George," asked she, seriously, "that was not the conviction it conveyed to your mind?"

"No, Julia, certainly not; but somehow—perhaps it is my colder northern blood, perhaps it is the cautious reserve of one who has not had enough

experience of life—but I own to you I distrust very high-flown declarations, and as a rule I like the men who do generous things, and don't think themselves heroes for doing them."

"Remember, George, it was a Frenchman who spoke thus; and from what I have seen of his nation, I would say that he meant all that he said. These people do the very finest things out of an exalted self-esteem. They carry the point of honour so high that there is no sacrifice they are not capable of making, if it only serve to elevate their opinion of themselves. Their theory is, they belong to the 'great nation,' and the motives that would do well enough for you or me, would be very ignoble springs of action to him whom Providence had blessed with the higher destiny of being born a Frenchman."

"You disparage while you praise them, Julia."

"I do not mean it then. I would simply say, I believe in all Count Pracontal said, and I give you my reason for the belief."

"How happy it would have made poor Augustus to have been met in this spirit. Why don't these two men know each other?"

"My dear George, the story of life could no more

go on than the story of a novel if there was no imbroglio. Take away from the daily course of events all misunderstandings, all sorrows, and all misconceptions, and there would be no call on humanity for acts of energy, or trustfulness, or devotion. We want all these things just that we may surmount them."

Whether he did not fully concur with the theory, or that it puzzled him, L'Estrange made no reply, and soon after left the room to prepare for their departure. And now they went the road up the valley of the Upper Rhine,—that wild and beautiful tract, so grand in outline and so rich in colour, that other landscapes seem cold after it. They wound along the Via Mala, and crossed over the Splugen, most picturesque of Alpine passes, and at last reached Chiavenna.

"All this is very enjoyable, George," said Julia, as they strolled carelessly in a trellised vine-walk; "but as I am the courier, and carry the money-sack, it is my painful duty to say, we can't do it much longer. Do you know how much remains in that little bag?"

"A couple of hundred francs perhaps," said he, listlessly.

"Not half that—how could there, you careless creature? You forget all the extravagances we have been committing, and this entire week of unheard-of indulgence."

"I was always 'had up' for my arithmetic at school. Old Hoskins used to say my figures would be the ruin of me."

The tone of honest sorrow in which he said this threw Julia into a fit of laughing.

"Here is the total of our worldly wealth," said she, emptying on a rustic table the leather bag, and running her fingers through a mass of silver in which a few gold coins glittered.

"It seems very little, Julia," said he, despondingly.

"Worse than that. It is less than it looks, George; these tarnished pieces, with a mock air of silver, are of most ignoble origin; they were born copper, and are only silver by courtesy. Let me see what it all makes."

While she was arranging the money in little piles on the table L'Estrange lighted a cigarette, and puffed it in leisurely fashion.

"Julia," said he at last, "I hope I haven't committed a dreadful folly in that investment of

your two thousand. You know I took the shares I told you of?"

"I remember, George, you said so; but has anything occurred to make you augur ill of the enterprise?"

"No; I know no more of it now than on the first day I heard of it. I was dazzled by the splendid promise of twenty per cent. instead of three that you had received heretofore. It seemed to me to be such a paltry fear to hesitate about doing what scores of others were venturing. I felt as if I were turning away from a big fence while half the field were ready to ride at it. In fact, I made it a question of courage, Julia, which was all the more inexcusable as the money I was risking was not my own."

"Oh, George, you must not say that to me."

"Well, well, I know what I think of myself, and I promise you it is not the more favourable because of your generosity."

"My dear George, that is a word that ought never to occur between us. Our interests are inseparable. When you have done what you believed was the best for me there is no question of anything more. There now, don't worry yourself further about

it. Attend to what I have to say to you here. We have just one hundred and twelve francs to carry us to Milan, where our letter of credit will meet us; so that there must be no more boat-excursions; no little picnics, with a dainty basket sent up the mountain at sunrise; none of that charming liberality which lights up the road with pleasant faces, and sets one a-thinking how happy Dives might have been if he had given something better than crumbs to Lazarus. No, this must be what you used to call a week of cold-mutton days, mind that, and resist all temptation to money-spending."

L'Estrange bowed his head in quiet acquiescence; his was the sad thought that so many of us have felt: how much of enjoyment life shows us, just one hair's-breadth beyond our power to grasp; vistas of lovely scenery that we are never to visit; glimpses of bliss closed to us even as we catch them; strains of delicious music of which all our efforts can but retain the dying cadences. Not that he felt all these in any bitterness of spirit; even in narrowed fortune life was very pleasant to him, and he was thoroughly, heartily grateful for the path fate had assigned him to walk in.

How would they have liked to have lingered in the Brianza, that one lovely bit of thoroughly rural Italy, with the green of the west blending through all the gorgeous glow of a tropical vegetation; how gladly they would have loitered on the Lake at Como —the brightest spot of landscape in Europe;—with what enjoyment had they halted at Milan, and still more in Florence! Stern necessity, however, whispered ever onwards; and all the seductions of Raffaels and Titians yielded before the hard demands of that fate that draws the purse-strings. Even at Rome they did not venture to delay, consoling themselves with the thought that they were to dwell so near, they could visit it at will. At last they reached Albano, and as they drove into the village caught sight of a most picturesque little cottage, enshrined in a copse of vines. It was apparently untenanted, and they eagerly asked if it were to be let. The answer was, No, it was waiting for the "Prete Inglese" who was daily expected to arrive.

"Oh, George, it is ours," cried Julia in ecstasy, and hid her head on his shoulder, and actually cried with excess of delight.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHURCH PATRONS AT ALBANO.

The patrons of the English chapel at Albano were the three great leaders of society in Rome in winter and at Albano during the summer. Of these the first was Lady Augusta Bramleigh; next came Sir Marcus Cluff; and last—not, indeed, either in activity or zeal—was Mrs. Trumpler, a widow-lady of considerable fortune, and no small share of energy in her nature.

To these George L'Estrange had brought formal letters of introduction, which he was cautiously enjoined should be presented in the order of their respective ranks,—making his first approaches to the Lady Augusta. To his request to know at what hour he might have the honour to wait on her ladyship, came a few lines on the back of his own card, saying,—"Two o'clock, and be punctual."

There did not seem to be any unnecessary courtesy in this curt intimation; but he dressed himself carefully for the interview, and with his cravat properly arranged by Julia, who passed his whole appearance in review, he set out for the pretty Villa of the Chestnuts, where her ladyship lived.

"I don't suppose that I'm about to do anything very unworthy, Julia," said he, as he bade her good-by; "but I assure you I feel lower in my own esteem this morning than I have known myself since —since——"

"Since you tumbled over the sunk fence, perhaps," said she, laughing, and turned back into the house.

L'Estrange soon found himself at the gate of the villa, and was conducted by a servant in deep mourning through a very beautiful garden to a small kiosk, or summer-house, where a breakfast-table was spread. He was punctual to the moment; but as her ladyship had not yet appeared he had ample time to admire the beauty of the Sévres cups of a pale blue, and the rich carving of the silver service,—evidently of antique mould, and by a master hand. The rare exotics which were disposed on every side, amongst which

some birds of bright plumage were encaged, seemed to fill up the measure of this luxurious spot, and impressed him with—he knew not what exalted idea of her who should be its mistress.

He waited, at first patiently enough—there was much to interest and amuse him ; but at last, as nigh an hour had elapsed, and she had not appeared, a feeling, half of irritation at the thought of neglect, and half doubt lest he should have mistaken what the servant said, began to worry and distress him. A little pendule on a bracket played a few bars of a waltz, and struck three. Should he wait any longer? was the question he put to himself. His sense of shame on leaving home at the thought of presenting himself before a patron came back upon him now with redoubled force. He had often felt that the ministers who preached for a call were submitting themselves to a very unworthy ordeal. The being judged by those they were appointed to teach seemed in itself little short of an outrage ; but the part he was now playing was infinitely worse ;—he had actually come to show himself, to see if, when looked at and talked to, her ladyship would condescend to be his patron, and as it were to impress the indignity

more strongly upon him he was kept waiting like a lacquey!

"I don't think I ought to stoop to this," muttered he bitterly to himself; and taking a card and a pencil from his pocket, he wrote:—"The Rev. George L'Estrange has waited from two to three o'clock in the hope of seeing Lady Augusta Bramleigh; he regrets the disappointment, as well as his inability to prolong his attendance." "There," cried he aloud, "I hope that will do!" and he placed the card conspicuously on the table.

"Do what, pray?" said a very soft voice, as a slight figure in deep mourning swept noiselessly into the kiosk, and taking the card up, sat down without reading it.

One glance showed that the handsome woman before him was Lady Augusta, and the bashful curate blushed deeply at the awkwardness of his position.

"Mr. L'Estrange, I presume?" said she, waving her hand to him to be seated. "And what is your card to do; not represent you, I hope, for I'd rather see you in person?"

"In my despair of seeing your ladyship I wrote a

line to say—to say "—and he blundered and stopped short.

"To say you'd wait no longer," said she, smiling; "but how touchy you must be. Don't you know that women have the privilege of unpunctuality? don't you know it is one of the few prerogatives you men have spared them? Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes—some hours ago."

"I forget whether I have not also. I rather think I did take some coffee. I have been very impatient for your coming. Sit here, please," said she, pointing to an arm-chair beside her own sofa. "I have been very impatient indeed to see you. I want to hear all about these poor Bramleighs;—you lived beside them, didn't you, and knew them all intimately? What is this terrible story of their ruin? this claim to their property? What does it mean? is there really anything in it?"

"It is somewhat of a long story," began L'Estrange.

"Then don't tell it, I entreat you. Are you married, Mr. L'Estrange?"

"No, madam, I have not that happiness," said he, smiling at the strange abruptness of her manner.

"Oh, I am so glad," she cried; "so glad! I'm not afraid of a parson, but I positively dread a parson's wife. The parson has occasionally a little tolerance for a number of things he doesn't exactly like; his wife never forgives them; and then a woman takes such exact measure of another woman's meanings, and a man knows nothing about them at all: that on the whole I'm delighted you are single, and I fervently trust you will remain so. Will you promise me as much? will you give me your word not to marry till I leave this?"

"I need scarcely pledge myself, madam, to that; my narrow fortune binds me whether I would or not."

"And you have your mother with you, haven't you?"

"No, madam; my sister has accompanied me."

"I wish it had been your mother. I do so like the maternal pride of a dear old lady in her fine handsome son. Isn't she vain of you? By the way, how did your choice fall upon the Church? You look more like a cavalry officer. I'm certain you ride well."

"It is, perhaps, the only accomplishment I

possess in the world," said he, with some warmth of manner.

"I'm delighted to hear that you're a horseman. There's a mare of mine become perfectly impossible. A stupid creature I took as groom hurt her mouth with a severe bit, and she rears now at the slightest touch. Couldn't you do something with her? Pray do; and in return I'll take you some charming rides over the Campagna. There's a little valley—almost a glen—near this, which I may say I discovered myself. You mustn't be afraid of bad tongues because you ride out with me. Mrs. Trumpler will of course take it up. She's odious—perfectly odious. You haven't seen her yet, but you'll have to call on her; she contributes a thousand francs a year to the Church, and must not be neglected. And then there's old Sir Marcus Cluff—don't forget him; and take care to remember that his mother was Lady Marion Otley, and don't remember that his father was Cluff and Gosler, the famous fishmonger. I protest I'm becoming as scandalous as Mrs. Trumpler herself. And mind that you come back and tell when you've seen these people what they said to you, and what you said to them, and whether they abused

me. Come to tea, or, if you like better, come and dine to-morrow at six, and I'll call on your mother in the meanwhile and ask her—though I'd rather you'd come alone."

"It is my sister, madam, that is with me," said he, with great difficulty refraining from a burst of laughter.

"Well, and I've said I'd visit her, though I'm not fond of women, and I believe they never like me."

L'Estrange blundered out some stupid compliment about her having in recompence abundant admiration from the other sex, and she laughed, and said, "Perhaps so. Indeed, I believe I am rather a favourite; but with clever men—not with the fools. You'll see that *they* avoid me. And so," said she, drawing a deep sigh, "you really can tell me nothing about these Bramleighs? And all this time I have been reckoning on your coming to hear everything, and to know about the will. Up to this hour, I am totally ignorant as to how I am left. Isn't that very dreadful?"

"It is very distressing indeed, madam."

"The Colonel always said he'd insert a clause or a something or other against my marrying again.

Can you imagine anything so ungenerous? It's unchristian, actually unchristian—isn't it?"

A slight gesture seemed to say that he agreed with her; but she was for once determined to be answered more definitely, and she said, "I'm sure, as a clergyman, you can say if there's anything in the Bible against my having another husband?"

"I'm certain there is not, madam."

"How nice it is in the Church of Rome that when there's anything you want to do, and it's not quite right to do it, you can have a dispensation —that is, the Pope can make it perfectly moral and proper, and legal besides. Protestantism is so narrow—terribly narrow. As the dear Monsignore Balbi said to me the other night, it is a long 'Act of Parliament against sin.' Wasn't that neat? They are so clever!"

"I am so new to Italy, madam, that I have no acquaintance with these gentlemen."

"I know you'll like them when you do know them; they are so gentle and so persuasive—I might say so fascinating. I assure you, Mr. L'Estrange, I ran a very great risk of going over, as it is called. Indeed, the *Osservatore Romano* said I had gone

over; but that was at least premature. These are things one cannot do without long and deep reflection, and intense self-examination—don't you think so? And the dear old Cardinal Bottesini, who used to come to us every Friday evening, warned me himself against my impulsiveness; and then poor Colonel Bramleigh"—here she raised her handkerchief to her eyes,—"he wouldn't hear of it at all; he was so devotedly attached to me—it was positive love in a man of his mould—that the thought of my being lost to him, as he called it, was maddening; and in fact he—he made it downright impossible—impossible!" And at last she paused, and a very painful expression in her face showed that her thoughts at the moment were far from pleasurable. "Where was I? what was it I was going to say?" resumed she, hurriedly. "Oh, I remember, I was going to tell you that you must on no account 'go over,' and therefore, avoid of all things what they call the 'controversy' here; don't read their little books, and never make close friendships with the Monsignori. You're a young man, and naturally enough would feel flattered at their attentions, and all the social attractions they'd surround you with.

Of course you know nothing of life, and that is the very thing they do understand; and perhaps it's not right of me to say it—it's like a treason —but the women, the great leaders of society, aid them powerfully. They'd like to bring you over," said she, raising her glass and looking at him. "You'd really look remarkably well in a chasuble and a cope. They'd positively fight for you as a domestic chaplain"—and the thought so amused her that she laughed outright, and L'Estrange himself joined her. "I hope I have not wearied you with my cautions and my warnings; but really, when I thought how utterly alone and friendless you must be here, nobody to consult with, none to advise you—for, after all, your mother could scarcely be an efficient guide in such difficulties—I felt it would be cruel not to come to your aid. Have you got a watch? I don't trust that little pendule, though it plays a delicious 'Ave Maria' of Rossini's. What hour is it?"

"Half-past four, madam. I am really shocked at the length of my visit."

"Well, I must go away. Perhaps you'll come and see my sister—she's charming, I assure you, and she'd like to know you?"

"If you will vouchsafe to present me on any other day, I shall be but too grateful; but Sir Marcus Cluff gave me a rendezvous for four o'clock."

"And you'll be with him at five," cried she, laughing. "Don't say it was I that made you break your appointment, for he hates me, and would never forgive you. By-by. Tell your mother I'll call on her to-morrow, and hope you'll both dine with me." And without waiting for a word in reply, she tripped out of the summer-house, and hastened away to the villa.

"L'Estrange had little time to think over this somewhat strange interview when he reached the entrance-gate to the grounds of Sir Marcus Cluff, and was scarcely admitted within the precincts when a phaeton and a pair of very diminutive ponies drove up, and a thin, emaciated man, carefully swathed in shawls and wrappers, who held the reins, called out, "Is that Mr. L'Estrange?"

The young parson came forward with his excuses for being late, and begged that he might not interrupt Sir Marcus in his intended drive.

"Will you take a turn with me?" said Sir Marcus, in a whining voice, that sounded like habitual com-

plaint. "I'm obliged to do this every day; it's the doctor's order. He says, 'Take the air and distract yourself;' and I do so." L'Estrange had now seated himself, and they drove away.

"I'm glad you've come," said Sir Marcus. "It will stop all this plotting and intriguing. If you had delayed much longer, I think they'd have had a dozen here—one of them a converted Jew, a very dirty fellow. O dear, how fatiguing it is! that little crop-eared pony pulls so he can't be held, and we call him John Bright; but don't mention it. I hope you have no family, sir?"

"I have my sister only."

"A sister isn't so bad. A sister may marry, or she may——" What was the other alternative did not appear, for John Bright bolted at this moment, and it was full five minutes ere he could be pulled up again. "This is the distraction I'm promised," said the sick man. If it wasn't for Mr. Needham—I call the near-sider Mr. Needham, as I bought him of that gentleman—I'd have too much distraction; but Needham never runs away—he falls; he comes down as if he was shot!" cried he, with a joyous twinkle of the eye, "and

I bought him for that. There's no drag ever was invented like a horse on his belly—the most inveterate runaway can't escape against that." If the little cackle that followed this speech did not sound exactly like a laugh, it was all of that emotion that Sir Marcus ever permitted himself.

"I can't ask you if you like this place. You're too newly come to answer that question," resumed he; "but I may ask what is the sort of society you prefer?"

"I've seen next to nothing of the world since I left the University. I have been living these last four or five years in one of the least visited spots in Great Britain, and only since the arrival of the Bramleigh family had a neighbour to speak to."

"Ah, then, you know these Bramleighs?" said the other with more animation than he had yet displayed. "Overbearing people, I've heard they were—very rich, and insolent to a degree."

"I must say I have found them everything that was kind and considerate, hospitable neighbours, and very warm-hearted friends."

"That's not the world's judgment on them, my dear sir—far from it. They are a proverb for pre-

tension and impertinence. As for Lady Augusta here—to be sure she's only one of them by marriage —but there's not a soul in the place she has not outraged. She goes nowhere—of course, *that* she has a right to do—but she never returns a call, never even sends a card. She went so far as to tell Mr. Pemberton, your predecessor here, that she liked Albano for its savagery; that there was no one to know, was its chief charm for her."

"I saw her for the first time this morning," said L'Estrange, not liking to involve himself in this censure.

"And she fascinated you, of course? I'm told she does that with every good-looking young fellow that comes in her way. She's a finished coquette, they say. I don't know what that means, nor do I believe it would have much success with me if I did know. All the coquetry she bestows upon me is to set my ponies off in full gallop whenever she overtakes me driving. She starts away in a sharp canter just behind me, and John Bright fancies it a race, and away he goes too, and if Mr. Needham was of the same mettle I don't know what would become of us. I'm afraid, besides, she's a connection

of mine. My mother, Lady Marion, was cousin to one of the Delahunts of Kings Cromer. Would you mind taking the reins for awhile, John is fearfully rash to-day? Just sit where you are, the near-side gives you the whip-hand for Needham. Ah, that's a relief! Turn down the next road on your left. And so she never asked you about your tenets—never inquired whether you were High Church or Low Church or no church at all?"

"Pardon me, Sir Marcus; she was particularly anxious that I should guard myself against Romish fascinations and advances."

"Ah, she knows them all! They thought they had secured her—indeed they were full sure of it; but as she said to poor Mr. Pemberton, they found they had hatched a duck. She was only flirting with Rome. The woman would flirt with the Holy Father, sir, if she had a chance. There's nothing serious, nothing real, nothing honest about her; but she charmed *you*, for all that—I see it. I see it all; and you're to take moonlight rides with her over the Campagna. Ha-ha-ha! Haven't I hit it? Poor old Pemberton —fifty-eight if he was an hour—got a bad bronchitis with these same night excursions. Worse than that,

he made the place too hot for him. Mrs. Trumpler—an active woman Mrs. T., and the eye of a hawk—wouldn't stand the 'few sweet moments,' as poor Pemberton in his simplicity called them. She threatened him with a general meeting, and a vote of censure, and a letter to the Bishop of Gibraltar; and she frightened him so that he resigned. I was away at the time at the baths at Ischia, or I'd have tried to patch up matters. Indeed, as I told Mrs. T., I'd have tried to get rid of my Lady, instead of banishing poor Pemberton, as kind-hearted a creature as ever I met, and a capital whist-player. Not one of your new-fangled fellows, with the 'call for trumps' and all the last devices of the Portland, but a steady player, who never varied—didn't go chopping about, changing his suits, and making false leads, but went manfully through his hearts before he opened his spades. We were at Christ Church together. I knew him for a matter of six-and-thirty years, Mr. L'Estrange, and I pledge you my word of honour"—here his voice grew tremulous with agitation—"and in all that time I never knew him revoke!" He drew his hat over his eyes as he spoke, and leaning back in the seat seemed almost overcome by his emotions.

"Will you turn in there at the small gate? It is a private entrance to my grounds. I'll not ask you to come in to-day, sir. I'm a little flurried and nervous; but if you'll join a sick man's dinner at two o'clock to-morrow—some rice and a chicken and a bit of fish—nothing more, I promise you. Well, well, I see it does not tempt you. My best thanks for your pleasant company. Let me see you soon. Take care of yourself, beware of my Lady, and avoid the moonlight!"

Apparently this little sally seemed to revive the invalid, for he stepped up the approach to his house with a lively air and waved his hand pleasantly as he said adieu.

"There's another still!" muttered L'Estrange as he inquired the way to Mrs. Trumpler's; "and I wish with all my heart it was over."

L'Estrange found Mrs. Trumpler at tea. She was an early diner, and took tea about six o'clock, after which she went out for an evening drive over the Campagna. In aspect, the lady was not prepossessing. She was very red-faced, with large grizzly curls arranged in a straight line across her forehead, and she wore spectacles of such a size as to give her

somewhat the look of an owl. In figure, she was portly and stout, and had a stand-up sort of air, that to a timid or bashful man, like the curate, was the reverse of reassuring.

"I perceive, sir, I am the last on your list," said she, looking at her watch as he entered. "It is past six."

"I regret, madam, if I have come at an inconvenient hour. Will you allow me to wait on you to-morrow?"

"No, sir. We will, with your permission, avail ourselves of the present to make acquaintance with each other." She rang the bell after this speech, and ordered that the carriage should be sent away. "I shall not drive, Giacomo," said she; "and I do not receive if any one calls."

"You brought me a letter, sir, from the Reverend Silas Smallwood," said she, very much in the tone of a barrister cross-examining a troublesome witness.

"Yes, madam; that gentleman kindly offered a friend of mine to be the means of presenting me to you."

"So that you are not personally acquainted, sir?"

"We have never, so far as I know, even seen each other."

"It is as well, sir, fully as well. Mr. Smallwood is a person for whose judgment or discrimination I would have the very humblest opinion, and I have, therefore, from what you tell me, the hope that you are not of his party in the Church."

"I am unable to answer you, madam, knowing nothing whatever of Mr. Smallwood's peculiar views."

"This is fencing, sir; and I don't admire fencing. Let us understand each other. What have you come here to preach? I hope my question is a direct one?"

"I am an ordained minister of the Church of England, madam; and when I have said so, I have answered you."

"What, sir? do you imagine your reply is sufficient in an age when not alone every doctrine is embraced within the Church, but that there is a very large and increasing party who are prepared to have no doctrine at all? I perceive, sir, I must make my approaches to you in a different fashion. Are you a man of vestments, gesticulations, and

glass windows? Do you dramatize your Christianity?"

"I believe I can say no, madam, to all these."

"Are you a Literalist, then? What about Noah, sir? Let me hear what you have to say about the Flood. Have you ever calculated what forty days' rainfall would amount to? Do you know that in Assam, where the rains are the heaviest in that part of the world, and in Colon, in Central America, no twelve hours' rain ever passed five inches and three-quarters? You are, I am sure, acquainted with Eschschormes' book on the Nile deposits? If not, sir, it is yonder—at your service. Now, sir, we shall devote this evening to the Deluge, and, so far as time permits, the age of the earth. To-morrow evening we'll take Moses, on Staub's suggestion that many persons were included under that name. We'll keep the Pentateuch for Friday, for I expect the Rabbi Bensi will be here by that time."

"Will you pardon me, madam," said L'Estrange, rising, "if I decline entering upon all discussion of these momentous questions with you? I have no such scholarship as would enable me to prove instructive, and I have conviction sufficiently strong, in

my faith in other men's learning, to enable me to reject quibbles and be unmoved by subtleties. Besides," added he, in a sharper tone, "I have come here to have the honour of making your acquaintance, and not to submit myself to an examination. May I wish you a good-evening?"

How he took his leave, how he descended the stairs, and rushed into the street, and found his way to the little inn where his sister wearily was waiting dinner for him, the poor curate never knew to the last day of his life.

CHAPTER XII.

A SMALL LODGING AT LOUVAIN.

In a very humble quarter of the old town of Louvain, at the corner of La Rue des Moines, Augustus Bramleigh and his sister had taken up their lodgings. Madame Jervasse, the proprietress of the house, had in her youth been the femme-de-chambre of some high-born dame of Brussels, and offered her services in the same capacity to Ellen, while, with the aid of her own servant, she prepared their meals, thus at once supplying the modest requirements they needed. Augustus Bramleigh was not a very resolute or determined man, but his was one of those natures that acquire solidity from pressure. When once he found himself on the road of sacrifices, his self-esteem imparted vigour and energy to his character. In the ordinary course of events he was accustomed to hold himself—his abilities and his temperament—cheaply

enough. No man was ever less self-opinionated or self-confident. If referred to for advice, or even for opinion, he would modestly decline the last, and say, "Marion or Temple perhaps could help you here." He shrank from all self-assertion whatever, and it was ever a most painful moment to him when he was presented to any one as the future head of the house and the heir to the Bramleigh estates. To Ellen, from whom he had no secrets, he had often confessed how he wished he had been a younger son. All his tastes and all his likings were those to be enjoyed by a man of moderate fortune, and an ambition even smaller than that fortune. He would say, too, half-jestingly, "With such aspiring spirits amongst us as Marion and Temple, I can afford myself the luxury of obscurity. *They* are sure to carry our banner loftily, and *I* may with safety go on my humble path unnoticed."

Jack had always been his favourite brother: his joyous nature, his sailor-like frankness, his spirit, and his willingness to oblige, contrasted very favourably with Temple's sedate, cautious manner, and the traces of a selfishness that never forgot itself. Had Jack been the second son instead of the youngest,

Augustus would have abdicated in his favour at once, but he could not make such a sacrifice for Temple. All the less that the very astute diplomatist continually harped on the sort of qualities which were required to dispense an ample fortune, and more than insinuated how much such a position would become himself, while another might only regard it as a burden and a worry. It was certainly a great shock to him to learn that there was a claimant to his family fortune and estate: the terrible feeling that they were to appear before the world as impostors,—holding a station and dispensing a wealth to which they had no right,—almost overcame him. The disgrace of a public exposure, the notoriety it would evoke, were about the most poignant sufferings such a man could be brought to endure. He to whom a newspaper comment, a mere passing notice of his name, was a source of pain and annoyance; that he should figure in a great trial and his downfall be made the theme of moral reflections in a leading article! How was this to be borne? What could break the fall from a position of affluence and power to a condition of penury and insignificance? Nothing —if not the spirit which by meeting disaster half-way,

seemed at least to accept the inevitable with courage, and so carry a high heart in the last moments of defeat.

Augustus well knew what a mistaken estimate the world had ever formed of his timid, bashful nature, and this had given his manner a semblance of pride and hauteur which made the keynote of his character. It was all in vain that he tried to persuade people that he had not an immeasurable self-conceit. They saw it in his every word and gesture, in his coolness when they approached him, in his almost ungraciousness when they were courteous to him. "Many will doubtless declare," said he, "that this reverse of fortune is but a natural justice on one who plumed himself too much on his prosperity, and who arrogated too far on the accident of his wealth. If so I can but say they will not judge me fairly. They will know nothing of where my real suffering lies. It is less the loss of fortune I deplore, than the world's judgment on having so long usurped that we had no right to."

From the day he read Sedley's letter and held that conversation with the lawyer, in which he heard that the claimant's case seemed a very strong one, and

that perhaps the Bramleighs had nothing to oppose to it of so much weight as the great fact of possession—from that hour he took a despairing view of the case. There are men who at the first reverse of fortune throw down their cards and confess themselves beaten. There are men who can accept defeat itself better than meet the vacillating events of a changeful destiny; who have no persistence in their courage, nor any resources to meet the coming incidents of life. Augustus Bramleigh possessed a great share of this temperament. It is true that Sedley after much persuasion induced him to entertain the idea of a compromise, carefully avoiding the use of that unhappy word, and substituting for it the less obnoxious expression "arrangement." Now this same arrangement, as Mr. Sedley put it, was a matter which concerned the Bramleighs collectively:—seeing that if the family estates were to be taken away, nothing would remain to furnish a provision for younger children. "You must ascertain what your brothers will do," wrote Sedley; "you must inquire how far Lord Culduff—who through his marriage has a rent-charge on the estate—will be willing to contribute to an 'arrangement.'"

Nothing could be less encouraging than the answer this appeal called forth. Lord Culduff wrote back in the tone of an injured man, all but declaring that he had been regularly taken in ; indeed, he did not scruple to aver that it had never been his intention to embark in a ship that was sure to founder, and he threw out something like a rebuke on the indelicacy of asking him to add to the sacrifice he had already made for the honour of being allied to them.

Temple's note ran thus :—

"Dear Gusty,—If your annoyances have not affected your brain, I am at a loss for an explanation of your last letter. How, I would ask you, is a poor secretary of legation to subsist on the beggarly pittance F. O. affords him? Four hundred and fifty per annum is to supply rent, clothes, club expenses, a stall at the opera, and one's little charities in perhaps one of the dearest capitals in Europe. So far from expecting the demand you have made upon me, I actually, at the moment of receiving yours, had a half-finished note on my writing-table asking you to increase my poor allowance. When I left Castello, I think you had sixteen horses. Can you possibly want more than two for the carriage and one for your own

riding? As to your garden and greenhouse expenses, I'll lay ten to one your first peas cost you a guinea a quart, and you never saw a pine at your table under five-and-twenty pounds; and now that I am on the theme of reduction, I would ask what do you want with a chef at two hundred and fifty a year? Do you, or does Ellen, ever eat of anything but the simplest diet at table? Don't you send away the entrées every day, wait for the roast gigot, or the turkey or the woodcocks, and in consequence, does not M. Grégoire leave the cookery to be done by one of his 'aides,' and betake himself to the healthful pursuit of snipe-shooting, and the evening delight of Mrs. Somebody's tea at Portshannon? Why not add this useless extravagance to the condemned list of the vineries, the stable, and the score of other extraordinaries, which an energetic hand would reduce in half-an-hour?

"I'm sure you'll not take it in ill part that I bring these things under your notice. Whether out of the balance in hand you will give me five hundred a year, or only three, I shall ever remain

"Your affectionate brother,

"Temple Edgerton Bramleigh."

"Read that, Nelly," said Augustus, as he threw it across the table. "I'm almost afraid to say what I think of it."

This was said as they sat in their little lodging in the Rue des Moines: for the letter had been sent through an embassy-bag, and consequently had been weeks on the road, besides lying a month on a tray in the Foreign Office till some idle lounger had taken the caprice to forward it.

"Where does he write from?"

"Her Majesty's Legation at Naples. Lord Culduff is there special, and Temple is acting as secretary to him."

"And does Marion send no message?"

"Oh, yes. She wants all the trunks and carriage-boxes which she left at Castello to be forwarded to town for transmission abroad. I don't think she remembers us much further. She hopes I will not have her old mare sold, but make arrangements for her having a free paddock for the rest of her life, and she adds that you ought to take the pattern of the slipper on her side-saddle, for if it should happen that you ever ride again, you'll find it better than any they make now."

"Considerate at all events. They tell us that love alone remembers trifles. Isn't this a proof of it, Gusty?"

"Read Temple now, and try to put me in better temper with him than I feel at this moment."

"I couldn't feel angry with Temple," said she, quietly. "All he does and all he says so palpably springs from consideration of self, that it would be unjust to resent in him what one would not endure from another. In fact, he means no harm to any one, and a great deal of good to Temple Bramleigh."

"And you think that commendable?"

"I have not said so; but it certainly would not irritate me."

She opened the letter after this and read it over leisurely.

"Well, and what do you say now, Nelly?" asked he.

"That it's Temple all over; he does not know why in this shipwreck every one is not helping to make a lifeboat for him. It seems such an obvious and natural thing to do that he regards the omission as scarcely credible."

"Does he not see—does he not care for the ruin that has overtaken us?"

"Yes, he sees it, and is very sorry for it, but he opines, at the same time, that the smallest amount of the disaster should fall to his share. Here's something very different," said she, taking a letter from her pocket. "This is from Julia. She writes from her little villa at Albano, and asks us to come and stay with them."

"How thoroughly kind and good-natured."

"Was it not, Gusty? She goes over how we are to be lodged, and is full of little plans of pleasure and enjoyment; she adds too, what a benefit you would be to poor George, who is driven half wild with the meddlesome interference of the Church magnates. They dictate to him in everything, and a Mrs. Trumpler actually sends him the texts on which she desires him to hold forth,—while Lady Augusta persecutes him with projects in which theological discussion, as she understands it, is to be carried on in rides over the Campagna, and picnics to the hills behind Albano. Julia says that he will not be able to bear it, without the comfort and companionship of some kind friend, to whom he can have recourse in his moments of difficulty."

"It would be delightful to go there, Nelly, but it is impossible."

"I know it is," said she gravely.

"We could not remove so far from England while this affair is yet undetermined. We must remain where we can communicate easily with Sedley."

"There are scores of reasons against the project," said she, in the same grave tone. "Let us not speak of it more."

Augustus looked at her, but she turned away her face and he could only mark that her cheeks and throat were covered with a deep blush.

"This part of Julia's letter is very curious," said she, turning to the last page. "They were stopping at a little inn one night where Pracontal and Longworth arrived, and George by a mere accident heard Pracontal declare that he would have given anything to have known you personally, that he desired above everything to be received by you on terms of friendship, and even of kindred; that the whole of this unhappy business could have been settled amicably, and in fact, he never ceased to blame himself for the line into which his lawyer's advice had led him, while all his wishes tended to an opposite direction."

"But Sedley says he has accepted the arrangement, and abandoned all claim in future."

"So he has, and it is for that he blames himself. He says it debars him from the noble part he desired to take."

"I was no part to this compromise, Nelly, remember that. I yielded to reiterated entreaty a most unwilling assent, declaring always that the law must decide the case between us, and the rightful owner have his own. Let not Mr. Pracontal imagine that all the high-principled action is on his side: from the very first I declared that I would not enjoy for an hour what I did not regard undisputably as my own. You can bear witness to this, Nelly. I simply assented to the arrangement, as they called it, to avoid unnecessary scandal. What the law shall decide between us, need call forth no evil passions or ill-will. If the fortune we had believed our own belongs to another, let him have it." The tone of high excitement in which he spoke plainly revealed how far a nervous temperament and a susceptible nature had to do with his present resolve. Nelly had seen this before, but never so fully revealed as now. She knew well the springs which

could move him to acts of self-sacrifice and devotion, but she had not thoroughly realized to herself that it was in a paroxysm of honourable emotion he had determined to accept the reverse of fortune, which would leave him penniless in the world.

"No, Nelly!" said he, as he arose and walked the room, with head erect, and a firm step. "We shall not suffer these people who talk slightingly of the newly risen gentry to have their scoff unchallenged! It is the cant of the day to talk of mercantile honour and City notions of what is high-minded and right, and I shall show them that *we* —'Lombard Street people,' as some newspaper scribe called us the other day—that we can do things the proudest earl in the Peerage would shrink back from as from a sacrifice he could not dare to face. There can be no sneer at a class that can produce men who accept beggary rather than dishonour. As that Frenchman said, these habits of luxury and splendour were things he had never known,—the want of them would leave no blank in *his* existence. Whereas to us they were the daily accidents of life —they entered into our ways and habits, and made part of our very natures; giving them up was like

giving up ourselves, surrendering an actual identity! You saw our distinguished connection, Lord Culduff, how he replied to my letter—a letter, by the way, I should never have stooped to write—but Sedley had my ear at the time and influenced me against my own convictions. The noble viscount, however, was free from all extraneous pressure, and he told us as plainly as words could tell it, that he had paid heavily enough already for the honour of being connected with us, and had no intention to contribute another sacrifice. As for Temple—I won't speak of him: poor Jack, how differently he would have behaved in such a crisis."

Happy at the opportunity to draw her brother away, even passingly, from a theme that seemed to press upon him unceasingly, she drew from the drawer of a little work-table a small photograph and handed it to him, saying, "Is it not like?"

"Jack!" cried he. "In a sailor's jacket too! what is this?"

"He goes out as a mate to China," said she calmly. "He wrote me but half a dozen lines, but they were full of hope and cheerfulness; he said that he had every prospect of getting a ship, when he was

once out; that an old messmate had written to his father—a great merchant at Shanghai—about him, and that he had not the slightest fears for his future."

"Would any one believe in a reverse so complete as this?" cried Augustus, as he clasped his hands before him. "Who ever heard of such ruin in so short a time?"

"Jack certainly takes no despairing view of life," said she quietly.

"What! does he pretend to say it is nothing to descend from his rank as an officer of the navy, with a brilliant prospect before him, and an affluent connection at his back, to be a common sailor, or at best one grade removed from a common sailor, and his whole family beggared? Is this the picture he can afford to look on with pleasure or with hope! The man who sees in his downfall, no sacrifice, or no degradation, has no sympathy of mine. To tell me that he is stout-hearted is absurd, he is simply unfeeling." Nelly's face and even her neck became crimson, and her eyes flashed indignantly; but she repressed the passionate words that were almost on her lips, and taking the photograph from him replaced it in the drawer and turned the key.

"Has Marion written to you?" asked he after a pause.

"Only a few lines. I'm afraid she's not very happy in her exalted condition after all, for she concluded with these words: 'It is a cruel blow that has befallen you, but don't fancy that there are not miseries as hard to bear in life as those which display themselves in public and flaunt their sufferings before the world.'"

"That old fop's temper perhaps is hard to bear with," said he carelessly.

"You must write to George L'Estrange, Gusty," said she coaxingly. "There are no letters he likes so much as yours. He says you are the only one who ever knew how to advise without taking that tone of superiority that is so offensive, and he needs advice just now—he is driven half wild with dictation and interference." She talked on in this strain for some time, till he grew gradually calmer, and his features, losing their look of intensity and eagerness, regained their ordinary expression of gentleness and quiet.

"Do you know what was passing through my mind just now?" said he, smiling half sadly. "I

was wishing it was George had been Marion's husband instead of Lord Culduff. We'd have been so united, the very narrowness of our fortunes would have banded us more closely together, and I believe, firmly believe, we might have been happier in these days of humble condition, than ever we were in our palmy ones: do you agree with me, Nelly?"

Her face was now crimson, and if Augustus had not been the least observant of men, he must have seen how his words had agitated her. She merely said with affected indifference, "Who can tell how these things would turn out? There's a nice gleam of sunlight, Gusty. Let us have a walk. I'll go for my hat."

She fled from the room before he had time to reply, and the heavy clap of a door soon told that she had reached her chamber.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT LOUVAIN.

THERE are few delusions more common with well-to-do people than the belief that if "put to it" they could earn their own livelihood in a variety of ways. Almost every man has some two or three or more accomplishments which he fancies would be quite adequate to his support, and remembering with what success the exercise of these gifts has ever been hailed in the society of his friends, he has a sort of generous dislike to be obliged to eclipse some poor drudge of a professional, who, of course, will be consigned to utter oblivion, after his own performance.

Augustus Bramleigh was certainly not a conceited, or a vain man, and yet he had often in his palmy days imagined how easy it would be for him to provide for his own support: he was something of a musician, he sang pleasingly, he drew a little, he

knew something of three or four modern languages, he had that sort of smattering acquaintance with questions of religion, politics, and literature, which the world calls being "well-informed;" and yet nothing short of grave Necessity revealed to him that, towards the object of securing a livelihood, a cobbler in his bulk was out and out his master.

The world has no need of the man of small acquirements, and would rather have its shoes mended by the veriest botch of a professional than by the cleverest amateur that ever studied a Greek sandal.

"Is it not strange, Nelly, that Brydges and Bowes won't take those songs of mine," said he one morning as the post brought him several letters. "They say they are very pretty, and the accompaniments full of taste, but so evidently wanting in originality—such palpable imitations of Gordigiani and Mariani—they would meet no success. I ask you, Nelly, am I the man to pilfer from any one. Is it likely I would trade on another man's intellect?"

"That you certainly are not, Gusty! but remember who it is that utters this criticism. The man who has no other test of goodness but a ready sale, and he sees in this case little hope of such."

"Rankin too refuses my 'Ghost Story;' he calls it too German, whatever that may mean."

"It means simply that he wants to say something and is not very clear what it ought to be. And your water-colour sketch—the Street in Bruges?"

"Worst of all," cried he, interrupting. "Dinetti, with whom I have squandered hundreds for prints and drawings, sends it back with these words in red chalk on the back:—"No distance; no transparency; general muddiness—a bad imitation of Prout's worst manner."

"How unmannerly; how coarse!"

"Yes; these purveyors to the world's taste don't mince matters with their journeymen. They remind them pretty plainly of their shortcomings; but considering how much of pure opinion must enter into these things, they might have uttered their judgments with more diffidence."

"They may not always know what is best, Gusty; but I take it, they can guess very correctly as to what the public will think best."

"How humiliating it makes labour when one has to work to please a popular taste. I always had fancied that the author, or the painter, or the musi-

cian, stood on a sort of pedestal, to the foot of which came the publisher, entreating that he might be permitted to catch the utterings of genius, and become the channel through which they should flow into an expectant world; and now I see it is the music-seller, or the print-seller is on the pedestal, and the man of genius kneels at his feet and prays to be patronized."

"I am sure, Gusty," said she, drawing her arm within his, as he stood at the window, "I am sure we must have friends who would find you some employment in the public service that you would not dislike, and you would even take interest in. Let us see first what we could ask for."

"No; first let us think of whom we could ask for it."

"Well, be it so. There is Sir Francis Deighton; isn't he a Cabinet Minister?"

"Yes. My father gave him his first rise in life; but I'm not sure they kept up much intimacy later on."

"I'll write to him, Gusty; he has all the Colonial patronage and could easily make you governor of something to-morrow. Say 'yes;' tell me I may write to him."

"It's not a pleasant task to assign you, dear

Nelly," said he, with a sad smile; "and yet I feel you will do it better than I should."

"I shall write," said she, boldly, "with the full assurance that Sir Francis will be well pleased to have an opportunity to serve the son of an old friend and benefactor."

"Perhaps it is that my late defeats have made me cowardly—but I own, Nelly, I am less than hopeful of success."

"And I am full of confidence. Shall I show you my letter when I have written it?"

"Better not, Nelly. I might begin to question the prudence of this, or the taste of that, and end by asking you to suppress it all. Do what you like then, and in your own way."

Nelly was not sorry to obtain permission to act free of all trammels, and went off to her room to write her letter. It was not till after many attempts that she succeeded in framing an epistle to her satisfaction. She did not wish—while reminding Sir Francis of whom it was she was speaking—to recall to him any unpleasant sentiment of an old obligation: she simply adverted to her father's long friendship for him, but dropped no hint of

his once patronage. She spoke of their reverse in fortune with dignity, and in the spirit of one who could declare proudly that their decline in station involved no loss of honour, and she asked that some employment might be bestowed on her brother, as upon one well deserving of such a charge.

"I hope there is nothing of the suppliant in all this? I hope it is such a note as Gusty would have approved of, and that my eagerness to succeed has involved me in no undue humility." Again and again she read it over; revising this, and changing that, till at length grown impatient, she folded it up and addressed it, saying aloud: "There! it is in the chance humour of him who reads, not in the skill of the writer, lies the luck of such epistles."

"You forgot to call him Right Honourable, Nelly," said Augustus, as he looked at the superscription.

"I'm afraid I've forgotten more than that, Gusty; but let us hope for the best."

"What did you ask for?"

"Anything,—whatever he can give you, and is disposed to give, I've said. We are in that category where the proverb says—there is no choice."

"I'd not have said that, Nelly."

"I know that, and it is precisely on that account that I said it for you. Remember, Gusty, you changed our last fifty pounds in the world yesterday."

"That's true," said he, sitting down near the table, and covering his face with both hands.

"There's a gentleman belowstairs, madam, wishes to know if he could see Mr. Bramleigh," said the landlady entering the room.

"Do you know his name?" said Nelly, seeing that as her brother paid no attention to the announcement, it might be as well not to admit a visitor.

"This is his card, madam."

"Mr. Cutbill!" said Nelly, reading aloud. "Gusty," added she, bending over him, and whispering in his ear, "would you see Mr. Cutbill?"

"I don't care to see him," muttered he, and then rising he added: "Well, let him come up; but mind, Nelly, we must on no account ask him to stay and dine with us."

She nodded assent, and the landlady retired to introduce the stranger.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CUTBILL'S VISIT.

"If you knew the work I had to find you," said Mr. Cutbill, entering the room and throwing his hat carelessly on a table. "I had the whole police at work to look you up, and only succeeded at last by the half-hint that you were a great political offender, and Lord Palmerston would never forgive the authorities if they concealed you."

"I declare," said Augustus, gravely, "I am much flattered by all the trouble you have taken to blacken my character."

"Character! bless your heart, so long as you ain't a Frenchman, these people don't care about your character. An English conspirator is the most harmless of all creatures. Had you been a Pole or an Italian, the Préfet told me, he'd have known every act of your daily life."

"And so we shall have to leave this, now?" said Ellen, with some vexation in her tone.

"Not a bit of it, if you don't dislike the surveillance they'll bestow on you; and it'll be the very best protection against rogues and pickpockets; and I'll go and say that you're not the man I suspected at all."

"Pray take no further trouble on our behalf, sir," said Bramleigh, stiffly and haughtily.

"Which being interpreted means,—make your visit as short as may be, and go your way, Tom Cutbill—don't it?"

"I am not prepared to say, sir, that I have yet guessed the object of your coming."

"If you go to that, I suspect I'll be as much puzzled as yourself. I came to see you because I heard you were in my neighbourhood. I don't think I had any other very pressing reason. I had to decamp from England somewhat hurriedly, and I came over here to be, as they call it, 'out of the way,' till this storm blows over."

"What storm? I've heard nothing of a storm."

"You've not heard that the Lisconnor scheme has blown up?—the great Culduff Mining Company

has exploded, and blown all the shareholders sky-high?"

"Not a word of it."

"Why, there's more writs after the promoters this morning than ever there was scrip for paid-up capital. We're all in for it—every man of us."

"Was it a mere bubble then—a fraud?"

"I don't know what you call a bubble, or what you mean by a fraud. We had all that constitutes a company: we had a scheme and we had a lord. If an over-greedy public wants grandeur and gain besides, it must be disappointed; as I told the general meeting, 'You don't expect profit as well as the peerage, do you?'"

"You yourself told me there was coal."

"So there was. I am ready to maintain it still. Isn't that money, Bramleigh?" said he, taking a handful of silver from his pocket; "good coin of the realm, with her Majesty's image? But if you asked me if there was much more where it came from—why, the witness might, as the newspapers say, hesitate and show confusion."

"You mean then, in short, there was only coal enough to form a pretext for a company?"

"I tell you what I mean," said Cutbill sturdily. "I bolted from London rather than be stuck in a witness-box and badgered by a cross-examining barrister, and I'm not going to expose myself to the same sort of diversion here from you."

"I assure you, sir, the matter had no interest for me, beyond the opportunity it afforded you of exculpation."

"For the exculpatory part, I can take it easy," said Cutbill with a dry laugh. "I wish I had nothing heavier on my heart than the load of my conscience; but I've been signing my name to deeds, and writing Tom Cutbill across acceptances, in a sort of indiscriminate way, that in the calmer hours before a Commissioner in Bankruptcy ain't so pleasant. I must say, Bramleigh, your distinguished relative, Culduff, doesn't cut up well."

"I think, Mr. Cutbill, if you have any complaint to make of Lord Culduff, you might have chosen a more fitting auditor than his brother-in-law."

"I thought the world had outgrown the cant of connection. I thought that we had got to be so widely-minded that you might talk to a man about his sister as freely as if she were the Queen of Sheba."

"Pray do me the favour to believe me still a bigot, sir."

"How far is Lord Culduff involved in the mishap you speak of, Mr. Cutbill?" said Nelly, with a courteousness of tone she hoped might restore their guest to a better humour.

"I think he'll net some five-and-twenty thousand out of the transaction; and from what I know of the distinguished viscount, he'll not lie awake at night fretting over the misfortunes of Tom Cutbill and fellows."

"Will this—this misadventure," stammered out Augustus, "prevent your return to England?"

"Only for a season. A man lies by for these things, just as he does for a thunderstorm; a little patience and the sun shines out, and he walks about freely as ever. If it were not, besides, for this sort of thing, we City men would never have a day's recreation in life; nothing but work, work, from morning till night. How many of us would see Switzerland, I ask you, if we didn't smash? The Insolvent Court is the way to the Rhine, Bramleigh, take my word for it, though it ain't set down in John Murray."

"If a light heart could help to a light conscience,

I must say, Mr. Cutbill, you would appear to possess that enviable lot."

"There's such a thing as a very small conscience," said Cutbill, closing one eye, and looking intensely roguish. "A conscience so unobtrusive that one can treat it like a poor relation, and put it anywhere."

"Oh, Mr. Cutbill, you shock me," said Ellen, trying to look reproachful and grave.

"I'm sorry for it, Miss Bramleigh," said he, with mock sorrow in his manner.

"Had not our friend L'Estrange an interest in this unfortunate speculation?" asked Bramleigh.

"A trifle; a mere trifle. Two thousand I think it was. Two, or two-five-hundred. I forgot exactly which."

"And is this entirely lost?"

"Well, pretty much the same; they talk of sevenpence dividend, but I suspect they're over-sanguine. I'd say five was nearer the mark,"

"Do they know the extent of their misfortune?" asked Ellen, eagerly.

"If they read *The Times* they're sure to see it. The money article is awfully candid, and never attempts

any delicate concealment like the reports in a police-court. The fact is, Miss Bramleigh, the financial people always end like Cremorne, with a 'grand transparency' that displays the whole company!"

"I'm so sorry for the L'Estranges," said Ellen, feelingly.

"And why not sorry for Tom Cutbill, miss? Why have no compassion for that gifted creature, and generous mortal, whose worst fault was that he believed in a lord?"

"Mr. Cutbill is so sure to sympathize with himself and his own griefs that he has no need of me; and then he looks so like one that would have recuperative powers."

"There you've hit it," cried he, enthusiastically. "That's it! that's what makes Tom Cutbill the man he is—flectes non frangis. I hope I have it right; but I mean you may smooth him down but you can't smash him; and it's to tell the noble viscount as much I'm now on my way to Italy. I'll say to the distinguished peer, 'I'm only a pawn on the chess-board; but look to it, my lord, or I'll give check to the king!' Won't he understand me? ay, in a second too!"

"I trust something can be done for poor L'Estrange," said Augustus. "It was his sister's fortune; and the whole of it, too."

"Leave that to me, then. I'll make better terms for him than he'll get by the assignee under the court. Bless your heart, Bramleigh, if it wasn't for a little 'extramural equity,' as one might call it, it would go very hard with the widow and the orphan in this world; but we, coarse-minded fellows, as I've no doubt you'd call us, we do kinder things in our own way than Commissioners under the Act."

"Can you recover the money for them?" asked Augustus, earnestly; "can you do that?"

"Not legally—not a chance of it; but I think I'll make a noble lord of our acquaintance disgorge something handsome. I don't mean to press any claim of my own. If he behaves politely, and asks me to dine, and treats me like a gentleman, I'll not be over hard with him. I like the—not the conveniences—that's not the word, but the——"

"'Convenances,' perhaps," interposed Ellen.

"That's it,—the convenances. I like the attentions that seem to say, 'T. C. isn't to be kept in a tunnel or a cutting; but is good company at table,

with long-necked bottles beside him. T. C. can be talked to about the world: about pale sherry, and pretty women, and the delights of Homburg, and the odds on the Derby; he's as much at home at Belgravia as on an embankment."

"I suspect there will be few to dispute that," said Augustus, solemnly.

"Not when they knows it, Bramleigh; 'not when they knows it,' as the cabbies say. The thing is to make them know it, to make them feel it. There's a rough-and-ready way of putting all men like myself, who take liberties with the letter H, down as snobs; but you see, there's snobs and snobs. There's snobs that are only snobs; there's snobs that have nothing distinctive about them but their snobbery, and there's snobs so well up in life, so shrewd, such downright keen men of the world, that their snobbery is only an accident, like a splash from a passing 'bus, and, in fact, their snobbery puts a sort of accent on their acuteness, just like a trade-mark, and tells you it was town-made;—no bad thing, Bramleigh, when that town calls itself London!"

If Augustus vouchsafed little approval of this speech, Ellen smiled an apparent concurrence, while

in reality it was the man's pretension and assurance that amused her.

"You ain't as jolly as you used to be; how is that?" said Cutbill, shaking Bramleigh jocosely by the arm. "I suspect you are disposed, like Jeremiah, to a melancholy line of life?"

"I was not aware, sir, that my spirits could be matter of remark," said Augustus, haughtily.

"And why not? You're no highness, royal or serene, that one is obliged to accept any humour you may be in, as the right thing. You are one of *us*, I take it."

"A very proud distinction," said he gravely.

"Well, if it's nothing to crow, it's nothing to cry for! If the world had nothing but top-sawyers, Bramleigh, there would be precious little work done. Is that clock of yours, yonder, right—is it so late as that?"

"I believe so," said Augustus, looking at his watch. "I want exactly ten minutes to four."

"And the train starts at four precisely. That's so like me. I've lost my train, all for the sake of paying a visit to people who wished me at the North Pole for my politeness."

"Oh, Mr. Cutbill," said Ellen, deprecatingly.

"I hope, Mr. Cutbill, we are fully sensible of the courtesy that suggested your call."

"And *I'm* fully sensible that you and Miss Ellen have been on thorns for the last half-hour, each muttering to himself, 'What will he say next?' or worse than that, 'When will he go?'"

"I protest, sir, you are alike unjust to yourself and to us. We are so thoroughly satisfied that you never intended to hurt us, that if incidentally touched, we take it as a mere accident."

"That is quite the case, Mr. Cutbill," broke in Nelly; "and we know besides, that, if you had anything harsh or severe to say to us, it is not likely you'd take such a time as this to say it."

"You do me proud, ma'am," said Cutbill, who was not perfectly sure whether he was complimented or reprimanded.

"Do, please, Augustus; I beg of you do," whispered Nelly in her brother's ear.

"You've already missed your train for us, Mr. Cutbill," said Augustus; "will you add another sacrifice and come and eat a very humble dinner with us at six o'clock?"

"Will I? I raythor think I will," cried he joyfully. "Now that the crisis is over, I may as well tell you I've been angling for that invitation for the last half-hour, saying every minute to myself, 'Now it's coming,' or 'No, it ain't.' Twice you were on the brink of it, Bramleigh, and you drifted away again, and at last I began to think I'd be driven to my lonely cutlet at the 'Leopold's Arms.' You said six; so I'll just finish a couple of letters for the post, and be here sharp. Good-by. Many thanks for the invite, though it was pretty long a-coming." And with this he waved an adieu and departed.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EVENING WITH CUTBILL.

When Nelly retired after dinner on that day, leaving Mr. Cutbill to the enjoyment of his wine—an indulgence she well knew he would not willingly forego—that worthy individual drew one chair to his side to support his arm, and resting his legs on another, exclaimed, "Now, this is what I call cosy. There's a pleasant light, a nice bit of view out of that window, and as good a bottle of St. Julien as a man may desire."

"I wish I could offer you something better," began Augustus, but Cutbill stopped him at once, saying,—

"Taking the time of the year into account, there's nothing better! It's not the season for a Burgundy or even a full-bodied claret. Shall I tell you,

Bramleigh, that you gave me a better dinner to-day than I got at your great house, the Bishop's Folly."

"We were very vain of our cook, notwithstanding, in those days," said Augustus, smiling.

"So you might. I suppose he was as good as money could buy—and you had plenty of money. But your dinners were grand, cumbrous, never-ending feeds, that with all the care a man might bestow on the bill-o'-fare, he was sure to eat too much of venison curry after he had taken mutton twice, and pheasant following after fat chickens. I always thought your big dinners were upside down; if one could have had the tail-end first they'd have been excellent. Somehow, I fancy it was only your brother Temple took an interest in these things at your house. Where is he now?"

"He's at Rome with my brother-in-law."

"That's exactly the company he ought to keep. A lord purifies the air for him, and I don't think his constitution could stand without one."

"My brother has seen a good deal of the world; and, I think, understands it tolerably well," said Bramleigh, meaning so much of rebuke to the other's

impertinence as he could force himself to bestow on a guest.

"He knows as much about life as a dog knows about decimals. He knows the cad's life of fetch and carry; how to bow himself into a room and out again; when to smile, and when to snigger; how to look profound admiration when a great man talks, and a mild despair when he is silent; but that ain't life, Bramleigh, any more than these strawberries are grapes from Fontainebleau!"

"You occasionally forget, Mr. Cutbill, that a man's brother is not exactly the public."

"Perhaps I do. I only had one brother, and a greater blackguard never existed; and *The Times* took care to remind me of the fact every year till he was transported; but no one ever saw me lose temper about it."

"I can admire if I cannot envy your philosophy."

"It's not philosophy at all; it's just common sense, learned in the only school for that commodity in Europe—the City of London. We don't make Latin verses as well as you at Eton or Rugby, but we begin life somewhat 'cuter than you, notwithstanding. If we speculate on events, it is not like

theoretical politicians, but like practical people, who know that Cabinet Councils decide the funds, and the funds make fortunes. *You* and the men like you advocated a free Greece and a united Italy for the sake of fine traditions. *We* don't care a rush about Homer or Dante, but we want to sell pig-iron and printed calicos. Do you see the difference now?"

"If I do, it's with no shame for the part you assign us."

"That's as it may be. There may be up there amongst the stars a planet where your ideas would be the right thing. Maybe Doctor Cumming knows of such a place. I can only say Tom Cutbill doesn't, nor don't want to."

For a while neither spoke a word; the conversation had taken a half irritable tone, and it was not easy to say how it was to be turned into a pleasanter channel.

"Any news of Jack?" asked Cutbill, suddenly.

"Nothing since he sailed."

Another and a longer pause ensued, and it was evident neither knew how to break the silence.

"These ain't bad cigars," said Cutbill, knocking

the ash off his cheroot with his finger. "You get them here?"

"Yes; they are very cheap."

"Thirty, or thirty-five centimes?"

"Ten!"

"Well, it ain't dear! Ten centimes is a penny,—a trifle less than a penny. And now, Bramleigh, will you think it a great liberty of me, if I ask you a question,—a sort of personal question?"

"That will pretty much depend upon the question, Mr. Cutbill. There are matters, I must confess, I would rather not be questioned on."

"Well, I suppose I must just take my chance for that! If you are disposed to bristle up, and play porcupine because I want to approach you, it can't be helped,—better men than Tom Cutbill have paid for looking into a wasp's nest. It's no idle curiosity prompts my inquiry, though I won't deny there is a spice of curiosity urging me on at this moment. Am I free to go on, eh?"

"I must leave you to your own discretion, sir."

"The devil a worse guide ever you'd leave me to. It is about as humble a member of the Cutbill family as I'm acquainted with. So that without any refer-

ence to my discretion at all, here's what I want. I want to know how it is that you've left a princely house, with plenty of servants and all the luxuries of life, to come and live in a shabby corner of an obscure town and smoke penny cigars? There's the riddle I want you to solve for me."

For some seconds Bramleigh's confusion and displeasure seemed to master him completely, making all reply impossible; but at last he regained a degree of calm, and with a voice slightly agitated, said: "I am sorry to baulk your very natural curiosity, Mr. Cutbill, but the matter on which you seek to be informed is one strictly personal and private."

"That's exactly why I'm pushing for the explanation," resumed the other, with the coolest imaginable manner. "If it was a public event I'd have no need to ask to be enlightened."

Bramleigh winced under this rejoinder, and a slight contortion of the face showed what his self-control was costing him.

Cutbill, however, went on: "When they told me, at the Gresham, that there was a man setting up a claim to your property, and that you declared you'd not live in the house, nor draw a shilling from the

estate, till you were well assured it was your own beyond dispute, my answer was, 'No son of old Montagu Bramleigh ever said that. Whatever you may say of that family, they're no fools.'"

"And is it with fools you would class the man who reasoned in this fashion?" said Augustus, who tried to smile and seem indifferent as he spoke.

"First of all, it's not reasoning at all; the man who began to doubt whether he had a valid right to what he possessed might doubt whether he had a right to his own name,—whether his wife was his own, and what not. Don't you see where all this would lead to? If I have to report whether a new line is safe and fit to be opened for public traffic, I don't sink shafts down to see if some hundred fathoms below there might be an extinct volcano, or a stratum of unsound pudding-stone. I only want to know that the rails will carry so many tons of merchandise. Do you see my point?—do you take me, Bramleigh?"

"Mr. Cutbill," said Augustus slowly, "on matters such as these you have just alluded to, there is no man's opinion I should prefer to yours, but there are other questions on which I would rather rely upon

my own judgment. May I beg, therefore, that we should turn to some other topic."

"It's true then,—the report was well-founded?" cried Cutbill, staring in wild astonishment at the other's face.

"And if it were, sir," replied Bramleigh, haughtily, "what then?"

"What then? Simply that you'd be the—no matter what. Your father was very angry with me one night, because I said something of the same kind to him." And as he spoke he pushed his glass impatiently from him, and looked ineffably annoyed and disgusted.

"Will you not take more wine, Mr. Cutbill?" said Augustus, blandly, and without the faintest sign of irritation.

"No, not a drop. I'm sorry I've taken so much. I began by filling my glass whenever I saw the decanter near me,—thinking, like a confounded fool as I was, we were in for a quiet confidential talk, and knowing that I was just the sort of fellow a man of your own stamp needs and requires; a fellow who does nothing from the claims of a class—do you understand?—nothing because he mixes with a cer-

tain set and dines at a certain club; but acts independent of all extraneous pressure,—a bit of masonry, Bramleigh, that wants no buttress. Can you follow me, eh?"

"I believe I can appreciate the strength of such a character as you describe."

"No, you can't, not a bit of it. Some flighty fool that would tell you what a fine creature you were, how great-hearted—that's the cant, great-hearted!—would have far more of your esteem and admiration than Tom Cutbill, with his keen knowledge of life and his thorough insight into men and manners."

"You are unjust to each of us," said Bramleigh, quietly.

"Well, let us have done with it. I'll go and ask Miss Ellen for a cup of tea, and then I'll take my leave. I'm sure I wish I'd never have come here. It's enough to provoke a better temper than mine. And now let me just ask you, out of mere curiosity,—for of course I mustn't presume to feel more,—but just out of curiosity let me ask you, do you know an art or an industry, a trade or a calling, that would bring you in fifty pounds a year? Do you see your

way to earning the rent of a lodging even as modest as this?"

"That is exactly one of the points on which your advice would be very valuable to me, Mr. Cutbill."

"Nothing of the kind. I could no more tell a man of your stamp how to gain his livelihood than I could make a tunnel with a corkscrew. I know your theory well enough. I've heard it announced a thousand times and more. Every fellow with a silk lining to his coat and a taste for fancy jewellery imagines he has only to go to Australia to make a fortune; that when he has done with Bond Street he can take to the bush. Isn't that it, Bramleigh—eh? You fancy you're up to roughing it and hard work because you have walked four hours through the stubble after the partridges, or sat a 'sharp thing' across country in a red coat! Heaven help you! It isn't with five courses and finger-glasses a man finishes his day at Warra-Warra."

"I assure you, Mr. Cutbill, as regards my own case, I neither take a high estimate of my own capacity nor a low one of the difficulty of earning a living."

"Humility never paid a butcher's bill, any more than conceit!" retorted the inexorable Cutbill, who

seemed bent on opposing everything. "Have you thought of nothing you could do? for, if you're utterly incapable, there's nothing for you but the public service."

"Perhaps that is the career would best suit me," said Bramleigh, smiling; "and I have already written to bespeak the kind influence of an old friend of my father's on my behalf."

"Who is he?"

"Sir Francis Deighton."

"The greatest humbug in the Government! He trades on being the most popular man of his day, because he never refused anything to anybody—so far as a promise went; but it's well known that he never gave anything out of his own connections. Don't depend on Sir Francis, Bramleigh, whatever you do."

"That is sorry comfort you give me."

"Don't you know any women?"

"Women—women? I know several."

"I mean women of fashion. Those meddlesome women that are always dabbling in politics and the Stock Exchange,—very deep where you think they know nothing, and perfectly ignorant about what they pretend to know best. They've two-thirds of the

patronage of every Government in England. You may laugh; but it's true."

"Come, Mr. Cutbill, if you'll not take more wine we'll join my sister," said Bramleigh, with a faint smile.

"Get them to make you a Commissioner—it doesn't matter of what—Woods and Forests—Bankruptcy—Lunacy—anything; it's always two thousand a year, and little to do for it. And if you can't be a Commissioner be an Inspector, and then you have your travelling expenses;" and Cutbill winked knowingly as he spoke, and sauntered away to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE APPOINTMENT.

"WHAT will Mr. Cutbill say now?" cried Ellen, as she stood leaning on her brother's shoulder while he read a letter marked "On her Majesty's Service," and sealed with a prodigious extravagance of wax. It ran thus:—

"SIR, "Downing Street, Sept. 10th.

"I HAVE received instructions from Sir Francis Deighton, her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, to acknowledge your letter of the 9th instant; and while expressing his regret that he has not at this moment any post in his department which he could offer for your acceptance, to state that her Majesty's Secretary for Foreign Affairs will consent to appoint you consul at Cattaro, full details of which post, duties, salary, &c., will be

communicated to you in the official despatch from the Foreign Office.

"Sir Francis Deighton is most happy to have been the means through which the son of an old friend has been introduced into the service of the Crown.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"GREY EGERTON D'EYNCOURT,

"*Private Secretary.*"

"What will he say now, Gusty?" said she, triumphantly.

"He will probably say, 'What's it worth?' Nelly. 'How much is the income?'"

"I suppose he will. I take it he will measure a friend's good feeling towards us by the scale of an official salary, as if two or three hundred a year more or less could affect the gratitude we must feel towards a real patron."

A slight twinge of pain seemed to move Bramleigh's mouth; but he grew calm in a moment, and merely said, "We must wait till we hear more."

"But your mind is at ease, Gusty? Tell me

that your anxieties are all allayed?" cried she, eagerly.

"Yes; in so far that I have got something—that I have not met a cold refusal."

"Oh, don't take it that way," broke she in, looking at him with a half-reproachful expression. "Do not, I beseech you, let Mr. Cutbill's spirit influence you. Be hopeful and trustful, as you always were."

"I'll try," said he, passing his arm round her and smiling affectionately at her.

"I hope he has gone, Gusty. I do hope we shall not see him again. He is so terribly hard in his judgments, so merciless in the way he sentences people who merely think differently from himself. After hearing him talk for an hour or so, I always go away with the thought that if the world be only half as bad as he says it is, it's little worth living in."

"Well, he will go to-morrow, or Thursday at farthest; and I won't pretend I shall regret him. He is occasionally too candid."

"His candour is simply rudeness; frankness is very well for a friend, but he was never in the position to use this freedom: Only think of what he said to me yesterday: he said that as it was not unlikely

I should have to turn governess or companion, the first thing I should do would be to change my name. 'They,' he remarked—but I don't well know whom he exactly meant—'they don't like broken-down gentlefolk. They suspect them of this, that, and the other;' and he suggested I should call myself Miss Cutbill. Did you ever hear impertinence equal to that?"

"But it may have been kindly intentioned, Nelly. I have no doubt he meant to do a good-natured thing."

"Save me from good-nature that is not allied with good manners, then," said she, growing crimson as she spoke.

"I have not escaped scot-free, I assure you," said he, smiling; "but it seems to me a man really never knows what the world thinks of him till he has gone through the ordeal of broken fortune. By the way, where is Cattaro? the name sounds Italian."

"I assumed it to be in Italy somewhere, but I can't tell you why."

Bramleigh took down his atlas, and pored patiently over Italy and her outlying islands for a

long time, but in vain. Nelly, too, aided him in his search, but to no purpose. While they were still bending over the map, Cutbill entered with a large despatch-shaped letter in his hand.

"The Queen's messenger has just handed me that for you, Bramleigh. I hope it's good news."

Bramleigh opened and read:—

"SIR, "Foreign Office.

"I HAVE had much pleasure in submitting your name to her Majesty for the appointment of consul at Cattaro, where your salary will be two hundred pounds a year, and twenty pounds for office expenses. You will repair to your post without unnecessary delay, and report your arrival to this department.

"I am, &c. &c.

"BIDDLESWORTH."

"Two hundred a year! Fifty less than we gave our cook!" said Bramleigh, with a faint smile.

"It is an insult, an outrage," said Nelly, whose face and neck glowed till they appeared crimson. "I

hope, Gusty, you'll have the firmness to reject such an offer."

"What does Mr. Cutbill say?" asked he, turning towards him.

"Mr. Cutbill says that if you're bent on playing Don Quixote, and won't go back and enjoy what's your own, like a sensible man, this pittance—it ain't more—is better than trying to eke out life by your little talents."

Nelly turned her large eyes, open to the widest, upon him, as he spoke, with an expression so palpably that of rebuke for his freedom, that he replied to her stare by saying,—

"Of course I am very free and easy. More than that, I'm downright rude. That's what you mean—a vulgar dog! but don't you see that's what diminished fortune must bring you to? You'll have to live with vulgar dogs. It's not only coarse cookery, but coarse company a man comes to. Ay, and there are people will tell you that both are useful—as alterātives, as the doctors call them."

It was a happy accident that made him lengthen out the third syllable of the word, which amused Nelly so much that she laughed outright.

"Can you tell us where is Cattaro, Mr. Cutbill?" asked Bramleigh, eager that the other should not notice his sister's laughter.

"I haven't the faintest notion; but Bollard, the messenger, is eating his luncheon at the station: I'll run down and ask him." And without waiting for a reply, he seized his hat and hurried away.

"One must own he is good-natured," said Nelly, "but he does make us pay somewhat smartly for it. His wholesome truths are occasionally hard to swallow."

"As he told us, Nelly, we must accept these things as part of our changed condition. Poverty wouldn't be such a hard thing to bear if it only meant common food and coarse clothing; but it implies scores of things that are far less endurable."

While they thus talked, Cutbill had hurried down to the station, and just caught the messenger as he was taking his seat in the train. Two others—one bound for Russia and one for Greece—were already seated in the compartment, smoking their cigars with an air of quiet indolence, like men making a trip by a river steamer.

"I say, Bollard," cried Cutbill, "where is Cattaro?"

"Don't know; is he a tenor?"

"It's a place; a consulate somewhere or other."

"Never heard of it. Have you, Digby?"

"It sounds like Calabria, or farther south."

"I know it," said the third man. "It's a vile hole; it's on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. I was wrecked there once in an Austrian Lloyd's steamer, and caught a tertian fever before I could get away. There was a fellow there, a vice-consul they called him: he was dressed in sheepskins, and, I believe, lived by wrecking. He stole my watch, and would have carried away my portmanteau, but I was waiting for him with my revolver, and winged him."

"Did nothing come of it?" asked another.

"They pensioned him, I think. I'm not sure; but I think they gave him twenty pounds a year. I know old Kepsley stopped eight pounds out of my salary for a wooden leg for the rascal. There's the whistle; take care, sir, you'll come to grief if you hang on."

Cutbill attended to the admonition, and bidding

the travellers good-by, returned slowly to the Bramleighs' lodgings, pondering over all he had heard, and canvassing with himself how much of his unpleasant tidings he would venture to relate.

"Where's your map," said he, entering. "I suspect I can make out the place now. Show me the Adriatic. Zara—Lissa,—what a number of islands.—Here you are, here's Bocca di Cattaro—next door to the Turks, by Jove."

"My dear Gusty, don't think of this, I beseech you," said Nelly, whispering. "It is enough to see where it is, to know it must be utter barbarism."

"I won't say it looks inviting," said Cutbill, as he bent over the map, "and the messenger hadn't much to say in its praise either."

"Probably not; but remember what you told me a while ago, Mr. Cutbill, that even this was better than depending on my little talents."

"He holds little talents in light esteem then?" said Ellen, tartly.

"That's exactly what I do," rejoined Cutbill, quickly. "As long as you are rich enough to be courted for your wealth, your little talents will find plenty of admirers; but as to earning your bread by

them, you might as well try to go round the Cape in an outrigger. Take it by all means,—take it, if it is only to teach you what it is to earn your own dinner."

"And is my sister to face such a life as this?"

"Your sister has courage for everything—but leaving you," said she, throwing her arm on his shoulder.

"I must be off. I have only half-an-hour left to pack my portmanteau and be at the station. One word with you alone, Bramleigh," said he in a low tone, and Augustus walked at once into the adjoining room.

"You want some of these, I'm certain," said Cutbill, as he drew forth a roll of crushed and crumpled bank-notes, and pressed them into Bramleigh's hand. "You'll pay them back at your own time; don't look so stiff, man; it's only a loan."

"I assure you, if I look stiff, it's not what I feel. I'm overwhelmed by your good-nature; but, believe me, I'm in no want of money."

"Nobody ever is; but it's useful all the same. Take them to oblige me; take them just to show you're not such a swell as won't accept even the

smallest service from a fellow like me—do now, do!" and he looked so pleadingly that it was not easy to refuse him.

"I'm very proud to think I have won such friendship; but I give you my word, I have ample means for all that I shall need to do; and if I should not, I'll ask you to help me."

"Good-by, then. Good-by, Miss Ellen," cried he aloud. "It's not *my* fault that I'm not a favourite with you;" and thus saying, he snatched his hat, and was down the stairs and out of the house before Bramleigh could utter a word.

"What a kind-hearted fellow it is," said he, as he joined his sister. "I must tell you what he called me aside for."

She listened quietly while he recounted what had just occurred, and then said,

"The Gospel tells us it's hard for rich men to get to heaven; but it's scarcely less hard for them to see what there is good here below! So long as we were well off I could see nothing to like in that man."

"That was my own thought a few minutes back; so you see, Nelly, we are not only travel-

ling the same road, but gaining the same experiences."

"Sedley says in this letter here," said Augustus the next morning as he entered the breakfast-room, "that Pracontal's lawyer is perfectly satisfied with the honesty of our intentions, and we shall go to trial in the November term on the ejectment case. It will raise the whole question, and the law shall decide between us."

"And what becomes of that—that arrangement," said she, hesitatingly, "by which M. Pracontal consented to withdraw his claim?"

"It was made against my consent, and I have refused to adhere to it. I have told Sedley so, and told him that I shall hold him responsible to the amount disbursed."

"But, dear Gusty, remember how much to your advantage that settlement would have been."

"I only remember the shame I felt on hearing of it, and my sorrow that Sedley should have thought my acceptance of it possible."

"But how has M. Pracontal taken this money and gone on with his suit?—surely both courses are not open to him?"

"I can tell you nothing about M. Pracontal. I only know that he, as well as myself, would seem to be strangely served by our respective lawyers, who assume to deal for us, whether we will or not."

"I still cling to the wish that the matter had been left to Mr. Sedley."

"You must not say so, Nelly; you must never tell me you would wish I had been a party to my own dishonour. Either Pracontal or I own this estate: no compromise could be possible without a stain to each of us, and for my own part I will neither resist a just claim nor give way to an unfair demand. Let us talk of this no more."

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH LORD CULDUFF.

In a room of a Roman palace large enough to be a church, but furnished with all the luxury of an English drawing-room, stood Lord Culduff, with his back to an ample fire, smoking a cigarette; a small table beside him supported a very diminutive coffee-service of chased silver, and in a deep-cushioned chair at the opposite side of the fireplace lay a toy terrier, asleep.

There were two fireplaces in the spacious chamber, and at a writing-table drawn close to the second of these sat Temple Bramleigh writing. His pen as it ran rapidly along was the only sound in the perfect stillness, till Lord Culduff, throwing the end of his cigarette away, said, "It is not easy to imagine so great an idiot as your worthy brother Augustus."

"A little selfishness would certainly not disimprove him," said Temple, coldly.

"Say sense, common sense, sir; a very little of that humble ingredient that keeps a man from walking into a well."

"I think you judge him hardly."

"Judge him hardly! Why, sir, what judgment can equal the man's own condemnation of himself? He has some doubts—some very grave doubts—about his right to his estate, and straightway he goes and throws it into a law-court. He prefers, in fact, that his inheritance should be eaten up by lawyers than quietly enjoyed by his own family. Such men are usually provided with lodgings at Hanwell; their friends hide their razors, and don't trust them with tooth-picks."

"Oh, this is too much: he may take an extreme view of what his duty is in this matter, but he's certainly no more mad than I am."

"I repeat, sir, that the man who takes conscience for his guide in the very complicated concerns of life is unfit to manage his affairs. Conscience is a constitutional peculiarity, nothing more. To attempt to subject the business of life to conscience would be

about as absurd as to regulate the funds by the state of the barometer."

"I'll not defend what he is doing—I'm as sorry for it as any one; I only protest against his being thought a fool."

"What do you say then to this last step of his, if it be indeed true that he has accepted this post?"

"I'm afraid it is; my sister Ellen says they are on their way to Cattaro."

"I declare that I regard it as an outrage. I can give it no other name. It is an outrage. What, sir, am I, who have reached the highest rank of my career, or something very close to it; who have obtained my Grand Cross; who stand, as I feel I do, second to none in the public service;—am I to have my brother-in-law, my wife's brother, gazetted to a post I might have flung to my valet!"

"There I admit he was wrong."

"That is to say, sir, that you feel the personal injury his indiscreet conduct has inflicted. You see your own ruin in his rashness."

"I can't suppose it will go that far."

"And why not, pray? When a Minister or Secretary of State dares to offend me—for it is

levelled at *me*—by appointing my brother to such an office, he says as plainly as words can speak, 'Your sun is set; your influence is gone. We place you below the salt to-day, that to-morrow we may put you outside the door.' *You* cannot be supposed to know these things, but *I* know them. Shall I give you a counsel, sir?"

"Any advice from you, my lord, is always acceptable."

"Give up the line. Retire;—be a gamekeeper, a billiard-marker; turn steward of a steamer, or correspond for one of the penny papers, but don't attempt to serve a country that pays its gentlemen like toll-keepers."

Temple seemed to regard this little outburst as such an ordinary event that he dipped his pen into the ink-bottle, and was about to resume writing, when Lord Culduff said, in a sharp, peevish tone,—

"I trust your brother and sister do not mean to come to Rome?"

"I believe they do, my lord. I think they have promised to pay the L'Estranges a visit at Albano."

"My lady must write at once and prevent it.

This cannot possibly be permitted. Where are they now?"

"At Como. This last letter was dated from the inn at that place."

Lord Culduff rang the bell, and directed the servant to ask if her ladyship had gone out.

The servant returned to say that her ladyship was going to dress, but would see his lordship on her way downstairs.

"Whose card is this? Where did this come from?" asked Lord Culduff, as he petulantly turned it round and round, trying to read the name.

"Oh, that's Mr. Cutbill. He called twice yesterday. I can't imagine what has brought him to Rome."

"Perhaps I might hazard a guess," said Lord Culduff, with a grim smile. "But I'll not see him. You'll say, Bramleigh, that I am very much engaged; that I have a press of most important business; that the Cardinal Secretary is always here. Say anything, in short, that will mean No, Cutbill!"

"He's below at this moment."

"Then get rid of him! My dear fellow, the

A B C of your craft is to dismiss the importunate. Go, and send him off!"

Lord Culduff turned to caress his whiskers as the other left the room; and having gracefully disposed a very youthful curl of his wig upon his forehead, was smiling a pleasant recognition of himself in the glass, when voices in a louder tone than were wont to be heard in such sacred precincts startled him. He listened, and suddenly the door was opened rudely, and Mr. Cutbill entered, Temple Bramleigh falling back as the other came forward, and closing the door behind.

"So, my lord, I was to be told you'd not see me, eh?" said Cutbill, his face slightly flushed by a late altercation.

"I trusted, sir, when my private secretary had told you I was engaged, that I might have counted upon not being broken in upon."

"There you were wrong, then," said Cutbill, who divested himself of an overcoat, threw it on the back of a chair, and came forward towards the fire. "Quite wrong. A man doesn't come a thousand and odd miles to be 'not-at-homed' at the end of it."

"Which means, sir, that I am positively reduced to the necessity of receiving you, whether I will or not?"

"Something near that, but not exactly. You see, my lord, that when to my application to your lawyer in town I received for answer the invariable rejoinder, 'It is only my lord himself can reply to this; his lordship alone knows what this, that, or t'other refers to,' I knew pretty well the intention was to choke me off. It was saying to me, Is it worth a journey to Rome to ask this question? and my reply to myself was, 'Yes, Tom Cutbill, go to Rome by all means.' And here I am."

"So I perceive, sir," said the other dryly and gravely.

"Now, my lord, there are two ways of transacting business. One may do the thing pleasantly, with a disposition to make matters easy and comfortable; or one may approach everything with a determination to screw one's last farthing out of it; to squeeze the lemon to the last drop. Which of these is it your pleasure we should choose?"

"I must endeavour to imitate, though I cannot rival your frankness, sir; and therefore I would say,

let us have that mode in which we shall see least of each other."

"All right. I am completely in your lordship's hands. You had your choice, and I don't dispute it. There, then, is my account. It's a trifle under fourteen hundred pounds. Your lordship's generosity will make it the fourteen, I've no doubt. All the secret-service part—that trip to town and the dinner at Greenwich—I've left blank. Fill it up as your conscience suggests. The Irish expenses are also low, as I lived a good deal at Bishop's Folly. I also make no charge for keeping you out of *Punch*. It wasn't easy, all the same, for the fellows had you, wig, waistcoat and all. In fact, my lord, it's a friendly document, though your present disposition doesn't exactly seem to respond to that line of action; but Tom Cutbill is a forgiving soul. Your lordship will look over this paper, then; and in a couple of days—no hurry, you know, for I have lots to see here—in a couple of days I'll drop in, and talk the thing over with you; for you see there are two or three points,—about the way you behaved to your brother-in-law, and such like, —that I'd like to chat a little with you about."

As Lord Culduff listened his face grew redder and redder, and his fingers played with the back of the chair on which he leaned with a quick, convulsive motion; and as the other went on he drew from time to time long, deep inspirations, as if invoking patience to carry him through the infliction. At last he said, in a half-faint voice, "Have you done, sir—is it over?"

"Well, pretty nigh. I'd like to have asked you about my lady. I know she had a temper of her own before you married her, and I'm rather curious to hear how you hit it off together. Does she give in—eh? Has the high and mighty dodge subdued her? I thought it would."

"Do me the great favour, sir, to ring that bell and to leave me. I am not very well," said Culduff, gasping for breath.

"I see that. I see you've got the blood to your head. When a man comes to your time of life, he must mind what he eats, and stick to pint bottles too. That's true as the Bible—pint bottles and plenty of Seltzer when you're amongst the seventies." And with this aphorism he drew on his coat, buttoned it leisurely to the collar, and with a familiar nod left the room.

"Giacomo," said Lord Culduff, "that man is not to be admitted again on any pretext. Tell the porter his place shall pay for it, if he passes the grille."

Giacomo bowed silent acquiescence, and Lord Culduff lay back on a sofa and said, "Tell Doctor Pritchard to come here, tell my lady, tell Mr. Temple, I feel very ill," and so saying he closed his eyes and seemed overcome.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT ALBANO.

"WHO do you think asks himself to dine with us to-day, Julia?" said L'Estrange to his sister on the day of the scene recorded in our last chapter.

"I cannot guess; but I am prepared to say I'll be glad to see any one."

"It is very dull for you, indeed," said he, compassionately.

"No, George, not that. Not half so bad for *me*, as for *you;* but somehow I felt it would be a relief to have a guest, who would oblige us to drop our grumblings and exert ourselves to talk of something besides our own personal worries. Now, who is it?"

"What would you say to Mr. Cutbill?"

"Do you mean the engineering man we saw at Castello?"

"The same."

"Oh, dear! I retract. I recall my last speech, and avow, in all humility, I was wrong. All I remember of that man—not much certainly—but all I do remember of him was that he was odious."

"He was amusing, in his way."

"Probably—but I detested 'his way.'"

"The Bramleighs said he was good-natured."

"With all my heart. Give him all the excellent qualities you like; but he will still remain insufferably ill-bred and coarse-minded. Why did you ask him, George?"

"I didn't; he asked himself. Here's his note: 'Dear L'Estrange'—familiar enough—'Dear L'Estrange,—I have just arrived here, and want to have some talk with you. I mean, therefore, to ask you to let me take a bit of dinner with you to-day. I shall be out by five or half-past. Don't make a stranger of me, but give me the cold mutton or whatever it is.—Yours, Tom Cutbill.'"

"What a type of the writer!"

"Well; but what can we get for dinner, Ju?"

"The cold mutton, I think. I'm sure the gentleman's estimate of his value as a guest cannot be too low."

"No, Julia, let us treat him to our best. He means kindly by coming out here to see us."

"I'd have taken the will for the deed with more of gratitude. Oh, George," cried she with fervour, "why will you be always so much obliged to the man who condescends to eat your salt? This Mr. Cutbill will be your patron for the next twenty-four hours."

"Certainly the man who dines with us cannot come for the excellence of our fare."

"That is a very ingenious bit of self-flattery; but don't trust it, George. Men eat bad dinners continually; and there is a sort of condescension in eating them at a friend's house, which is often mistaken for good-nature; and the fun of it is that the men who do these things are very vain of the act."

L'Estrange gave a little shrug of his shoulders. It was his usual reply to those subtleties which his sister was so fond of, and that he was never very sure whether they were meant to puzzle or to persuade him.

"So then he is to be an honoured guest, George, eh?"

He smiled a gentle assent, and she went on: "And we are to treat him to that wonderful Rhine wine Sir Marcus sent you to cure your ague. And the very thought of drinking anything so costly actually brought on a shivering attack."

"Have we any of it left?"

"Two bottles, if those uncouth little flattened flasks can be called bottles. And since you are resolved he is to be entertained like a 'Prince Russe,' I'll actually treat him to a dish of maccaroni of my own invention. You remember, George, Mrs. Monkton was going to withdraw her subscription from the Church when she ate of it, and remained a firm Protestant."

"Julia, Julia!" said he in a half-reproving tone.

"I am simply citing an historical fact, but you'll provoke me to say much worse if you stand there with that censorial face. As if I didn't know how wrong it was to speak lightly of a lady who subscribes two hundred francs a year."

"There are very few who do so," said he with a sigh.

"My poor brother," said she caressingly, "it is a very hard case to be so poor, and we with such refined

tastes and such really nice instincts; we, who would like a pretty house, and a pretty garden, and a pretty little equipage, and who would give pretty little dinners, with the very neatest cut glass and china, and be, all the time, so cultivated and so simple, so elevated in tone and so humble in spirit. There, go away, and look after some fruit—do something, and don't stand there provoking me to talk nonsense. That solemn look made me ten times more silly than I ever intended to be."

"I'm sure," said L'Estrange, thoughtfully, "he has something to tell me of the coal-mine."

"Ah, if I thought that, George? If I thought he brought us tidings of a great 'dividend'—isn't that the name for the thing the people always share amongst themselves, out of somebody else's money? So I have shocked you, at last, into running away; and now for the cares of household."

Now though she liked to quiz her brother about his love of hospitality and the almost reckless way in which he would spend money to entertain a guest, it was one of her especial delights to play hostess, and receive guests with whatever display their narrow fortune permitted. Nor did she spare any pains she

could bestow in preparing to welcome Mr. Cutbill, and her day was busily passed between the kitchen, the garden, and the drawing-room, ordering, aiding, and devising with a zeal and activity that one might have supposed could only have been evoked in the service of a much honoured guest.

"Look at my table, George," said she, "before you go to dress for dinner, and say if you ever saw anything more tasteful. There's a bouquet for you; and see how gracefully I have twined the grape-leaves round these flasks. You'll fancy yourself Horace entertaining Mæcenas. Mr. Cutbill is certainly not very like him,—but no matter. Nor is our little Monte Oliveto exactly Falernian."

"It is quite beautiful, Ju, all of it," said he, drawing her towards him and kissing her; but there was a touch of sadness in his voice, as in his look, to which she replied with a merry laugh, and said,—

"Say it out boldly, George, do; say frankly what a sin and a shame it is, that such a dear good girl should have to strain her wits in this hand-to-hand fight with Poverty, and not be embellishing some splendid station with her charming talents, and such like."

"I was thinking something not very far from it," said he smiling.

"Of course you were; but you never thought, perhaps, how soon ennui and lassitude might have taken the place of all my present energy. I want to please you now, George, since without me you would be desolate; but if we were rich, you'd not depend on me, and I'd have been very dispirited and very sad. There now, that's quite enough of sentimentalizing for once. I'm off to dress. Do you know," said she, as the mounted the stairs, "I have serious thoughts of captivating Mr. Cutbill?"

"Oh, Julia, I entreat—" but she was gone ere he could finish, and her merry laughter was heard till her door closed.

Poor girl, her light-heartedness died out as she felt herself alone, and turning towards a little photograph of a man in a naval uniform, that hung over the chimney, her eyes grew dim with tears as she gazed on it.

"Ay," said she, bitterly, "and this same humour it was that lost me the truest heart that ever beat! What would I not give now to know that he still remembered me—remembered me with kindness!"

She sat down, with her face buried in her hands, nor stirred till the sound of voices beneath apprised her that their guest had arrived.

While she was yet standing before her glass, and trying to efface the traces of sorrow on her features, George tapped softly at her door. "May I come in?" cried he. "Oh, Julia," said he, as he drew nigh, "it is worse than I had even suspected. Cutbill tells me that——"

He could not go on, but, bending his head on her shoulder, sobbed hysterically.

"George, George, do not give way thus," said she, calmly. "What is it has happened? What has he told you?"

"The mine — the Lisconnor scheme—is bankrupt."

"Is that all?"

"All! Why it is ruin—utter ruin! Every shilling that you had in the world is gone, and I have done it all." And once more his feelings overcame him, and he sobbed convulsively.

"But, my dear, dear brother," said she, fondly, "if it's lost it's lost, and there's no help for it; and let us never fret over what binds us only the closer

together. You can't get rid of me now, for I declare, George, no earthly consideration will make me accept Mr. Cutbill."

"Oh, how can you jest this way, Julia, at such a moment!"

"I assure you I am most serious. I know that man intends to propose to me, and you are just in the humour to mix up our present misfortunes and his pretensions, and actually espouse his cause; but it's no use, George, no use whatever. I'll not consent. Go downstairs, now. Stay, let me wipe those red eyes. Don't let that man see any trace of this sorrow about you; bear up quietly and well. You shall see that I do not give counsel without being able to show example. Go down now, and I'll follow you."

As he left the room she sat down, and accidentally so as to see her face in the glass. The forced smile which she had put on was only slowly vanishing from her features, and she was shocked at the pallor that now succeeded.

"I *am* looking very ill," muttered she. "There's no denying it. That man will certainly see how this news has struck me down, and I would not that he should witness my want of courage. I wish I had—

no, I don't. I'd not put on rouge if I had it; but I wish we were alone to-day, and could talk over our fortune together. Perhaps it's as well as it is." And now she arose and descended the stairs hastily, as though not to give herself time for further thought.

Cutbill was in the act of cautioning L'Estrange against speaking of the Lisconnor misfortune to his sister when she entered the room. "Do you forget me, Miss L'Estrange," said he, coming forward, "or am I to remind you that we met in Ireland?"

"Forget you, Mr. Cutbill, replied she laughingly; "how can I forget the charming tenor who sang second to me, or the gallant cavalier who rode out with me?"

"Ay, but I got a roll in a duck-pond that day," said he, grimly. "You persuaded me to let the beast drink, and he lay down in the water and nearly squashed me."

"Oh, you almost killed me with laughter. I had to hold on by the crutch of my saddle to save myself from falling into the pond."

"And I hear you made a sketch of me."

"Have you not seen it? I declare I thought I

had shown it to you; but I will after dinner, if I can find it."

The dinner was announced at this moment, and they proceeded to the dining-room.

"Taste is everything," said Cutbill, as he unfolded his napkin, and surveyed the table, decked out with fruit and flowers with a degree of artistic elegance that appealed even to *him*. "Taste is everything. I declare to you that Howell and James would pay fifty pounds down just for that urn as it stands there. How you twined those lilies around it in that way is quite beyond me."

As the dinner went on he was in ecstasy with everything.

"Don't part with your cook, even after they make a bishop of you," said he. "I don't know the French name of that dish, but I believe it's a stewed hare. Might I send my plate twice?"

"Mr. Cutbill saw the Bramleighs at Como, Julia," said L'Estrange, to take him, if possible, off the subject of the entertainment.

"I did, indeed. I met them at that very hotel that was once Queen Caroline's house. There they were diverting themselves,—boating and going about

just as if the world had gone all right with them; and Bramleigh told me one morning, that he had cashed the last cheque for fifty pounds."

"And is he really determined to touch nothing of his property till the law assures him that his right is undeniable?"

"Worse than that, far worse; he has quarrelled with old Sedley, his father's law-agent for forty years, and threatened him with an action for having entered into a compromise without instructions or permission; and he is wrong, clearly wrong, for I saw the correspondence, and if it goes before a jury, they'll say at once that there was consent."

"Had he then forgotten it?" asked Julia.

"No, he neither forgets nor remembers; but he has a sort of flighty way of getting himself into a white heat of enthusiasm; and though he cools down occasionally into a little common sense, it doesn't last; he rushes back into his heroics, and raves about saving him from himself, rescuing him from the ignoble temptation of self-interest, and such like balderdash."

"There must be a great deal of true nobility in such a nature," said Julia.

"I'll tell you what there is; and it runs through them all except the eldest daughter, and that puppy the diplomatist,—there's madness!"

"Madness?"

"Well, I call it madness. Suppose now I was to decline taking another glass of that wine—Steinheimer I think it's called—till I saw your brother's receipt for the payment of it, wouldn't you say I was either mad or something very near it?"

"I don't see the parity between the two cases," said Julia.

"Ah, you're too sharp for me, Miss Julia, too sharp; but I'm right all the same. Isn't Jack Bramleigh mad? Is it anything but madness for a man to throw up his commission and go and serve as a sailor,—before the mast or behind it, I don't care which; but isn't that madness?"

Julia felt a sense of sickness almost to fainting, but she never spoke nor stirred, while George, quickly noticing her state, turned towards Cutbill and said,—

"What news have you of him? he was a great favourite of mine."

"Of yours and of everybody's," said Cutbill. And now the colour rushed back to Julia's cheek,

and had Cutbill but looked towards her, it is very probable he would greatly have misconstrued the smile she gave him. "I wish I had news of him; but for these last few months I have none. When he got out to China he found that great house, Alcock and Baines, smashed—all the tea-merchants were smashed—and they tell me that he shipped with a Yankee for Constantinople."

"You heard from him, then?"

"No; he never writes to any one. He may send you a newspaper, or a piece of one, to show where he is; but he says he never was able to say what was in his head, and he always found he was writing things out of the 'Complete Correspondent.'"

"Poor Jack!"

"Shall I go and look after your coffee, George? You say you like me to make it myself," said Julia; and she arose and left the room almost before he could reply.

"You'll never marry while she's your housekeeper, I see that," said Cutbill, as the door closed after her.

"She is my greatest comfort in life," said the other warmly.

"I see it all; and the whole time of dinner I was thinking what a pity it was—— No matter, I'll not say what I was going to say. I'm glad you haven't told her of the smash till I see what I can do with the old viscount."

"But I have told her; she knows it all."

"And do you tell me she had that heavy load on her heart all the time she was talking and laughing there?"

L'Estrange nodded.

"It's only women bear up that way. Take my word for it, if it had been one of us, he'd not have come down to dinner, he'd not have had pluck to show himself. There's where they beat us, sir,—that's real courage."

"You are not taking your wine," said L'Estrange, seeing him pass the bottle.

"No; I want my head clear this evening, I want to be cool and collected. I'll not drink any more. Tell me about yourself a little; how do you get on here? do you like the place? do you like the people?"

"The place is charming; we like it better every day we live in it."

"And the people—the English I mean; what of them?"

"They mean kindly enough, indeed they are often very kind; but they do not live in much harmony, and they only agree in one thing——"

"I know what that is. They all join to worry the parson—of course they do. Did you ever live in a lodging-house, L'Estrange? If you did, you must have seen how the whole population coalesced to torment the maid-of-all-work. She belonged to them all, collectively and individually. And so it is with you. You are the maid-of-all-work. You have to make Brown's bed, and black Robinson's boots—spiritually I mean—and none recognizes the claim of his neighbour, each believes you belong to himself. That's the voluntary system, as they call it; and a quicker way to drive a man mad was never invented."

"Perhaps you take an extreme view of it—" began L'Estrange.

"No, I don't," interrupted the other. "I've only to look at your face, and instead of the fresh cheeks and the clear bright eyes I remember when I saw you first, I see you now anxious and pale

and nervous. Where's the pluck that enabled you to ride at a five-foot wall? Do you think you could do it now?"

"Very likely not. Very likely it is all the better I should not."

"You'll not get me to believe that. No man's nature was ever bettered for being bullied."

L'Estrange laughed heartily, not in the least degree angered by the other's somewhat coarse candour.

"It's a queer world altogether; but maybe if each of us was doing the exact thing he was fit for, life wouldn't be half as good a thing as it is. The whole thing would be like a piece of machinery, and instead of the hitches and makeshifts that we see now, and that bring out men's qualities and test their natures, we'd have nothing but a big workshop, where each did his own share of the work, and neither asked aid nor gave it. Do you permit a cigar?"

"Of course; but I've nothing worth offering you."

"I have though," said he, producing his case and drawing forth a cheroot, and examining it with that keen scrutiny and that seeming foretaste of enjoy-

ment peculiar to smokers. "Try that, and tell me when you tasted the equal of it. Ah, L'Estrange, we must see and get you out of this. It's not a place for you. A nice little vicarage in Hants or Herts, a sunny glebe, with a comfortable house and a wife; later on, a wife of course, for your sister won't stay with you always."

"You've drawn a pleasant picture—only to rub it out again."

"Miss Julia has got a bad headache, sir," said the maid, entering at this moment, "and begs you will excuse her. Will you please to have coffee here or in the drawing-room?"

"Ay, here," said Cutbill, answering the look with which the other seemed to interrogate him. "She couldn't stand it any longer, and no wonder; but I'll not keep you away from her now. Go up and say, I'll see Lord Culduff in the morning, and if I have any news worth reporting, I'll come out here in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XIX.

"A RECEPTION" AT ROME.

It was the night of the Countess Balderoni's weekly reception, and the servants had just lighted up the handsome suite of rooms and disposed the furniture in fitting order, when the Countess and Lady Augusta Bramleigh entered to take a passing look at the apartment before the arrival of the guests.

"It is so nice," said Lady Augusta, in her peculiar languid way, "to live in a country where the people are civilized enough to meet for intercourse without being fed, or danced, or fiddled for. Now, I tried this in London; but it was a complete failure. If you tell English people you are 'at home' every Tuesday or every Thursday evening, they will make a party some particular night and storm your salons in hundreds, and you'll be left with three or four

visitors for the remainder of the season. "Isn't that so?"

"I suspect it is. But you see how they fall into our ways here; and if they do not adopt them at home, there may be something in the climate or the hours which forbids it."

"No, cara; it is simply their dogged material spirit, which says, 'We go out for a dejeúné, or a dinner, or a ball.' There must be a substantial programme of a something to be eaten or to be done. I declare I believe I detest our people."

"How are you, then, to live amongst them?"

"I don't mean it. I shall not go back. If I grow weary of Europe, I'll try Egypt, or I'll go live at Lebanon. Do you know, since I saw Lear's picture of the cedars, I have been dying to live there. It would be so delightful to lie under the great shade of those glorious trees, with one's 'barb' standing saddled near, and groups of Arabs in their white burnouses scattered about. What's this? Here's a note for you."

The Countess took the note from the servant, and ran her eyes hurriedly over it. "This is impossible," murmured she, "quite impossible. Only think,

Gusta, here is the French Secretary of Legation, Baron de Limayrac, asking my permission to present to me no less a person than Monsieur de Pracontal."

"Do you mean the Pracontal—the Pretender himself?"

"Of course. It can be no other. Can you imagine anything so outrageously in bad taste. Limayrac must know who this man is, what claims he is putting forward, who he assumes to be; and yet he proposes to present him here. Of course I shall refuse him."

"No, cara, nothing of the kind. Receive him by all means. You or I have nothing to do with law or lawyers—he does not come here to prosecute his suit. On the contrary, I accept his wish to make our acquaintance as an evidence of a true gentlemanlike instinct; and, besides, I am most eager to see him."

"Remember, Gusta, the Culduffs are coming here, and they will regard this as a studied insult. I think I should feel it such myself in their place."

"I don't think they could. I am certain they ought not. Does any one believe that every person in a room with four or five hundred is his dear friend, devoted to him, and dying to serve him? If you do

not actually throw these people together, how are they more in contact in your salon than in the Piazza del Popolo?"

"This note is in pencil, too," went she on. "I suppose it was written here. Where is the Baron de Limayrac?"

"In his carriage, my lady, at the door."

"You see, dearest, you cannot help admitting him."

The Countess had but time to say a few hurried words to the servant, when the doors were thrown open, and the company began to pour in. Arrivals followed each other in rapid succession, and names of every country in Europe were announced, as their titled owners—soldiers, statesmen, cardinals, or ministers—passed on, and "grandes dames," in all the plenitude of splendid toilette, sailed proudly by, glittering with jewels and filmy in costly lace.

While the Countess Balderoni was exchanging salutations with a distinguished guest, the Baron de Limayrac stood respectfully waiting his time to be recognized.

"My friend, Count Pracontal, madame," said he, presenting the stranger, and, though a most frigid

bow from the hostess acknowledged the presentation, Pracontal's easy assurance remained unabashed, and, with the coolest imaginable air, he begged he might have the great honour of being presented to Lady Augusta Bramleigh.

Lady Augusta, not waiting for her sister's intervention, at once accepted the speech as addressed to herself, and spoke to him with much courtesy.

"You are new to Rome, I believe?" said she.

"Years ago I was here; but not in the society. I knew only the artists, and that Bohemian class who live with artists," said he, quite easily. "Perhaps I might have the same difficulty still, but Baron de Limayrac and I served together in Africa, and he has been kind enough to present me to some of his friends."

The unaffected tone and the air of good-breeding with which these few words were uttered, went far to conciliate Lady Augusta in his favour; and after some further talk together she left him, promising, at some later period of the evening, to rejoin him and tell him something of the people who were there.

"Do you know, cara, that he is downright charming?" whispered she to her sister as they walked

together through the rooms. "Of course I mean Pracontal. He is very witty, and not in the least ill-natured. I'm so sorry the Culduffs have not come. I'd have given anything to present Pracontal to his cousin—if she be his cousin. Oh, here they are; and isn't she splendid in pearls?"

Lord and Lady Culduff moved up the salon as might a prince and princess royal, acknowledging blandly, but condescendingly, the salutations that met them. Knowing and known to every one, they distributed the little graceful greetings with that graduated benignity great people, or would-be great people—for they are more alike than is generally believed,—so well understand.

Although Lady Augusta and Lady Culduff had exchanged cards, they had not yet met at Rome, and now, as the proud peer moved along triumphant in the homage rendered to his own claims and to his wife's beauty, Lady Augusta stepped quietly forward, and in a tone familiarly easy said, "Oh, we've met at last, Marion. Pray make me known to Lord Culduff." In the little act of recognition which now passed between these two people, an acute observer might have detected something almost bordering on free-

masonry. They were of the same "order," and, though the circumstances under which they met left much to explain, there was that between them which plainly said, "*We* at least play on 'the square' with each other. *We* are within the pale, and scores of little misunderstandings that might serve to separate or estrange meaner folk, with *us* can wait for their explanations." They chatted away pleasantly for some minutes over the Lord Georges and Lady Georginas of their acquaintance, and reminded each other of little traits of this one's health or that one's temper, as though of these was that world they belonged to made up and fashioned. And all this while Marion stood by mute and pale with anger, for she knew well how Lady Augusta was intentionally dwelling on a theme she could have no part in. It was with a marked change of manner, so marked as to imply a sudden rush of consciousness, that Lady Augusta, turning to her, said,—

"And how do you like Rome?"

A faint motion of the eyelids, and a half-gesture with the shoulders, seeming to express something like indifference, was the reply.

"I believe all English begin in that way. It is

a place to grow into—its ways, its hours, its topics are all its own."

"I call it charming," said Lord Culduff, who felt appealed to.

"If you stand long on the brink here," resumed she, "like a timid bather, you'll not have courage to plunge in. You must go at it at once, for there are scores of things will scare you, if you only let them."

Marion stood impassive and fixed, as though she heard but did not heed what was said, while Lord Culduff smiled his approval and nodded his assent in most urbane fashion.

"What if you came and dined here to-morrow, Marion? My sister is wonderfully 'well up' in the place. I warn you as to her execrable dinner; for her cook is Italian, pur sang, and will poison you with his national dishes: but we'll be en petit comité."

"I think we have something for to-morrow," said Marion, coldly, and looking to Lord Culduff.

"To-morrow—Thursday, Thursday?" said he, hesitating. "I can't remember any engagement for Thursday."

"There is something, I'm sure," said Marion, in the same cold tone.

"Then let it be for Friday, and you'll meet my brother-in-law; it's the only day he ever dines at home in the week."

Lord Culduff bowed an assent, and Marion muttered something that possibly meant acquiescence.

"I've made a little dinner for you for Friday," said Lady Augusta to her sister. "The Culduffs and Monsignore Ratti—that, with Tonino and ourselves, will be six; and I'll think of another: we can't be an even number. Marion is heart-broken about coming; indeed, I'm not sure we shall see her, after all."

"Are we so very terrible then?" asked the Countess.

"Not *you*, dearest; it is *I* am the dreadful one. I took that old fop a canter into the Peerage, and he was so delighted to escape from Bramleighia, that he looked softly into my eyes, and held my hand so unnecessarily long, that she became actually sick with anger. Now I'm resolved that the old lord shall be one of my adorers."

"Oh, Gusta!"

"Yes. I say it calmly and advisedly; that young woman must be taught better manners than to pat the ground impatiently with her foot and to toss her head away when one is talking to her husband. Oh, there's that poor Count Pracontal waiting for me, and looking so piteously at me; I forgot I promised to take him a tour through the rooms, and tell him who everybody is."

The company began to thin off soon after midnight, and by one o'clock the Countess and her sister found themselves standing by a fireplace in a deserted salon, while the servants passed to and fro extinguishing the lights.

"Who was that you took leave of with such emphatic courtesy a few minutes ago?" asked Lady Augusta, as she leaned on the chimney-piece.

"Don't you know; don't you remember him?"

"Not in the least."

"It was Mr. Temple Bramleigh."

"What, mon fils Temple! Why didn't he come and speak to me?"

"He said he had been in search of you all the evening, and even asked me to find you out."

"These Sevigné curls do that; no one knows

me. Monsignore said he thought I was a younger sister just come out, and was going to warn me of the dangerous rivalry. And that was Temple? His little bit of moustache improves him. I suppose they call him good-looking?"

"Very handsome—actually handsome."

"Oh, dear!" sighed the other, wearily; "one likes these gatherings, but it's always pleasant when they're over; don't you find that?" And not meeting a reply, she went on: "That tiresome man, Sir Marcus Cluff, made a descent upon me, to talk of—what do you think?—the church at Albano. It seems our parson there has nothing to live on during the winter months, and he is expected to be alive and cheery when spring comes round; and Sir Marcus says, that though seals do this, it's not so easy for a curate; and so I said, 'Why doesn't he join the other army? There's a cardinal yonder will take him into his regiment;' and Sir Marcus couldn't stand this, and left me." She paused, and seemed lost in a deep reverie, and then half murmured rather than said, "What a nice touch he has on the piano; so light and so liquid withal."

"Sir Marcus, do you mean?"

"Of course I don't," said she, pettishly. "I'm talking of Pracontal. I'm sure he sings—he says not, or only for himself; and so I told him he must sing for *me*, and he replied, 'Willingly, for I shall then be beside myself with happiness.' Just fancy a Frenchman trying to say a smart thing in English. I wonder what the Culduffs will think of him?"

"Are they likely to have an opportunity for an opinion?"

"Most certainly they are. I have asked him for Friday. He will be the seventh at our little dinner."

"Not possible, Gusta! You couldn't have done this!"

"I have, I give you my word. Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

"All the reason in the world. You ask your relatives to a little dinner, which implies extreme intimacy and familiarity; and you invite to meet them a man, whom by every sentiment of self-interest, they must abhor."

"Cara mia, I can't listen to such a vulgar argument. M. de Pracontal has charming personal qualities. I chatted about an hour with him, and he

is delightfully amusing; he'll no more obtrude his claims or his pretensions than Lord Culduff will speak of his fifty years of diplomatic service. There is no more perfect triumph of good-breeding than when it enables us to enjoy each other's society irrespective of scores of little personal accidents, political estrangements, and the like; and to show you that I have not been the inconsiderate creature you think me, I actually did ask Pracontal if he thought that meeting the Culduffs would be awkward or unpleasant for him, and he said he was overjoyed at the thought; that I could not have done him a favour he would prize more highly."

"*He*, of course, is very vain of the distinction. It is an honour he never could have so much as dreamed of."

"I don't know that. I half suspect he is a gentleman who does not take a depreciatory estimate of either himself or his prospects."

"At all events, Gusta, there shall be no ambuscade in the matter, that I'm determined on. The Culduffs shall know whom they are to meet. I'll write a note to them before I sleep."

"How angry you are for a mere nothing. Do

you imagine that the people who sit round a dinner-table have sworn vows of eternal friendship before the soup?"

"You are too provoking, too thoughtless," said the other, with much asperity of voice, and taking up her gloves and her fan from the chimney-piece, she moved rapidly away and left the room.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME "SALON DIPLOMACIES."

Lord Culduff, attired in a very gorgeous dressing-gown, and a cap whose gold tassel hung down below his ear, was seated at a writing-table, every detail of whose appliances was an object of art. From a little golden censer at his side a light blue smoke curled, that diffused a delicious perfume through the room, for the noble lord held it, that these adventitious aids invariably penetrated through the sterner material of thought, and relieved by their graceful influence the more laboured efforts of the intellect.

He had that morning been preparing a very careful confidential despatch; he meant it to be a state paper. It was a favourite theory of his, that the Pope might be "exploité,"—and his own phrase must be employed to express his meaning,—that is,

that for certain advantages, not very easily defined, nor intelligible at first blush, the Holy Father might be most profitably employed in governing Ireland. The Pope, in fact, in return for certain things which he did not want, and which we could not give him if he did, was to do for us a number of things perfectly impossible, and just as valueless had they been possible. The whole was a grand dissolving view of a millennial Ireland, with all the inhabitants dressed in green broadcloth, singing, "God save the Queen;" while the Pope and the Sacred College were to be in ecstasy over some imaginary concessions of the British Government, and as happy over these supposed benefits as an Indian tribe over a present of glass beads from Birmingham.

The noble diplomatist had just turned a very pretty phrase on the peculiar nature of the priest;—his one-sided view of life, his natural credulity, nurtured by church observances, his easily satisfied greed, arising from the limited nature of his ambitions, and, lastly, the simplicity of character engendered by the want of those relations of the family which suggest acute study of moral traits, strongly tinctured with worldliness. Rising above the dialectics of the

"Office," he had soared into the style of the essayist. It was to be one of those despatches which F. O. prints in blue-books, and proudly points to, to show that her sons are as distinguished in letters as they are dexterous in the conduct of negotiations. He had just read aloud a very high-sounding sentence, when Mr. Temple Bramleigh entered, and in that nicely subdued voice which private-secretaryship teaches, said, "Mr. Cutbill is below, my lord; will you see him?"

"On no account! The porter has been warned not to admit him, on pain of dismissal. See to it, that I am not intruded on by this man."

"He has managed to get in somehow—he is in my room this moment."

"Get rid of him, then, as best you can. I can only repeat that here he shall not come."

"I think, on the whole, it might be as well to see him: a few minutes would suffice," said Temple, timidly.

"And why, sir, may I ask, am I to be outraged by this man's vulgar presence, even for a few minutes? A few minutes of unmitigated rudeness is an eternity of endurance!"

"He threatens a statement in print; he has a letter ready for *The Times*," muttered Temple.

"This is what we have come to in England. In our stupid worship of what we call public opinion, we have raised up the most despotic tribunal that ever decided a human destiny. I declare solemnly, I'd almost as soon be an American. I vow to heaven that, with the threat of Printing-House Square over me, I don't see how much worse I had been if born in Kansas or Ohio!"

"It is a regular statement of the Lisconnor Mine, drawn up for the money article, and if only a tithe of it be true——"

"Why should it be true, sir?" cried the noble lord, in a tone that was almost a scream. "The public does not want truth,—what they want is a scandal—a libellous slander on men of rank; men of note like myself. The vulgar world is never so happy as when it assumes to cancel great public services by some contemptible private scandal. Lord Culduff has checkmated the Russian Ambassador. I know that, but Moses has three acceptances of his protested for non-payment. Lord Culduff has outwitted the Tuileries.—Why doesn't he pay his bootmaker?

That's their chanson, sir,—that's the burden of their low vulgar song. As if *I*, and men of *my* stamp, were amenable to every petty rule and miserable criticism that applies to a clerk in Somerset House. They exact from us the services of a giant, and then would reduce us to their own dwarfish standard, whenever there is question of a moral estimate."

He walked to and fro as he spoke, his excitement increasing at every word, the veins in his forehead swelling and the angles of his mouth twitching with a spasmodic motion. "There, sir," cried he, with a wave of his hand; "let there be no more mention of this man. I shall want to see a draft of the educational project, as soon as it is completed. That will do," and with this he dismissed him.

No sooner was the door closed on his departure, than Lord Culduff poured some scented water into a small silver ewer, and proceeded to bathe his eyes and temples, and then, sitting down before a little mirror, he smoothed his eyebrows, and patiently disposed the straggling hairs into line. "Who's there? come in," cried he, impatiently, as a tap was heard at the door, and Mr. Cutbill entered with the bold and assured look of a man determined on an insolence.

"So, my lord, your servants have got orders not to admit me—the door is to be shut against me!" said he, walking boldly forward and staring fiercely at the other's face.

"Quite true, however you came to know it," said Culduff, with a smile of the easiest, pleasantest expression imaginable. "I told Temple Bramleigh this morning to give the orders you speak of. I said it in these words: Mr. Cutbill got in here a couple of days ago, when I was in the middle of a despatch, and we got talking of this, that, and t'other, and the end was, I never could take up the clue of what I had been writing. A bore interrupts but does not distract you; a clever man is sure, by his suggestiveness, to lead you away to other realms of thought: and so I said, a strict quarantine against two people—I'll neither see Antonelli nor Cutbill."

It was a bold shot, and few men would have had courage for such effrontery; but Lord Culduff could do these things with an air of such seeming candour and naturalness, nothing less than a police-agent could have questioned its sincerity.

Had a man of his own rank in life "tried it on" in this fashion, Cutbill would have detected the impu-

dent fraud at once. It was the superb dignity, the consummate courtesy of this noble viscount, aided by every appliance of taste and luxury around him, that assured success here.

"Take that chair, Cutbill, and try a cheroot—I know you like a cheroot. And now for a pleasant gossip; for I *will* give myself a holiday this morning."

"I am really afraid I interrupt you," began Cutbill.

"You do; I won't affect to deny it. You squash that despatch yonder as effectually as if you threw the ink-bottle over it. When once I get to talk with a man like you, I can't go back to the desk again. Don't you know it yourself? Haven't you felt it scores of times? The stupid man is got rid of just as readily as you throw a pebble out of your shoe; it is your clever fellow that pricks you like a nail."

"I'm sorry, my lord, you should feel me so painfully," said Cutbill, laughing, but with an expression that showed how the flattery had touched him.

"You don't know what a scrape I've got into about *you*."

"About *me?*"

"Yes. My lady heard you were here the other morning, and gave me a regular scolding for not having sent to tell her. You know you were old friends in Ireland."

"I scarcely ventured to hope her ladyship would remember me."

"What! Not remember your admirable imitations of the speakers in the House?—your charming songs that you struck off with such facility—the very best impromptus I ever heard. And, mark you, Cutbill, I knew Theodore Hook intimately,—I mean, difference of age and such-like considered, for I was a boy at the time,—and I say it advisedly, you are better than Hook."

"Oh, my lord, this is great flattery!"

"Hook was uncertain, too. He was what the French call *journalier*. Now, that, you are not."

Cutbill smiled, for, though he did not in the least know the quality ascribed to him, he was sure it was complimentary, and was satisfied.

"Then there was another point of difference between you. Hook was a snob. He had the uneasy consciousness of social inferiority, which continually drove him to undue familiarities. Now, I will say, I

never met a man so free from this as yourself. I have made a positive study of you, Cutbill, and I protest I think, as regards tact, you are unrivalled."

"I can only say, my lord, that I never knew it."

"After all," said Lord Culduff, rising and standing with his back to the fire, while, dropping his eyelids he seemed to fall into a reflective vein—"After all, this, as regards worldly success, is the master quality. You may have every gift, and every talent, and every grace, and, wanting 'tact,' they are all but valueless."

Cutbill was silent. He was too much afraid to risk his newly acquired reputation by the utterance of even a word.

"How do you like Rome?" asked his lordship, abruptly.

"I can scarcely say; I've seen very little of it. I know nobody; and, on the whole, I find time hang heavily enough on me."

"But you *must* know people, Cutbill; you must go out. The place has its amusing side; it's not like what we have at home. There's another tone, another style; there is less concentration, so to say, but there's more 'finesse.'"

Cutbill nodded, as though he followed and assented to this.

"Where the priest enters, as such a considerable element of society, there is always a keener study of character than elsewhere. In other places you ask, What a man does? here you inquire, Why he does it?"

Cutbill nodded again.

"The women, too, catch up the light delicate touch which the churchmen are such adepts in; and conversation is generally neater than elsewhere. In a fortnight or ten days hence, you'll see this all yourself. How are you for Italian? Do you speak it well?"

"Not a word, my lord."

"Never mind. French will do perfectly. I declare I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to the First Empire for having given us a language common to all Europe. Neither cooking nor good manners could go on without it, and àpropos of cooking, when will you dine here? They are good enough to say here that my cook is the best in Rome. When will you let me have your verdict on him?"

Cutbill felt all the awkwardness that is commonly

experienced when a man is asked to be his own inviter.

"To-day," continued Lord Culduff, "we dine at the Duc de Rignano's; we have promised Lady Augusta for Friday; but Saturday, I believe Saturday is free. Shall we say Saturday, Cutbill—eight for half-past? Now, don't fail us. We shall have a few people in the evening, so make no other engagement. By-by."

Cutbill muttered out his acceptance, and retired, half delighted with his success, and half distrustful as to whether he had done what he had come to do, or whether, in not approaching the subject, he had not earned a stronger claim to the possession of that "tact" which his lordship had so much admired in him.

"I'm sure he's an old fox; but he's wonderfully agreeable," muttered he, as he descended the stairs. It was only as he turned into the Piazza di Spagna, and saw L'Estrange standing looking in at a print-shop, that he remembered how he had left the curate to wait for him, while he made his visit.

"I'm afraid, from your look," said L'Estrange, "that you have no very good news for me. Am I right?"

"Well," said the other, in some confusion, "I won't say that I have anything one could call exactly reassuring to tell."

"Did he suffer you to go into the question fully? Did he show a disposition to treat the matter with any consideration?"

Cutbill shook his head. The consciousness that he had done nothing, had not even broached the subject for which his visit was ostensibly made, overwhelmed him with shame; and he had not the courage to avow how he had neglected the trust committed to him.

"Don't mince matters with me, for the sake of sparing me," continued L'Estrange. "I never closed my eyes last night, thinking over it all; and you can't lower me in my own esteem below what I now feel. Out with it, then, and let me hear the worst, if I must hear it."

"You must have a little patience. Things are not always so bad as they look. I'm to have another interview; and though I won't go so far as to bid you hope, I'd be sorry to say despair. I'm to see him again on Saturday."

"Two more days and nights of anxiety and waiting! But I suppose I deserve it all, and worse. It

was in a spirit of greed—ay, of gambling—that I made this venture; and if the punishment could fall on myself alone, I deserve it all."

"Come, come, don't take on in that fashion; never say die. When do the Bramleighs arrive?—don't you expect them this week?"

"They promised to eat their Christmas dinner with us; but shall we have one to give them? You know, I suppose, how matters have gone at Albano? The church patrons have quarrelled, and each has withdrawn his name. No: Mrs. Trumpler remains, and she has drawn out a new code of her own—a thirty-nine articles of her own devising, which I must subscribe, or forfeit her support. The great feature of it all is, that the Bible is never to be quoted except to disprove it; so that what a man lacks in scholarship, he may make up in scepticism."

"And do you take to that?"

"Not exactly; and in consequence I have resigned my chaplaincy, and this morning I received a notice to vacate my house by the last day of the year, and go—I don't think it was suggested where to in particular—but here comes my sister—let us talk of something else."

"Oh, George," cried she, "I have got you such a nice warm coat for your visiting in the cold weather. Will you promise me to wear it, though you will look like a bear? How d'ye-do, Mr. Cutbill?"

"I'm bobbish, miss, thank you. And you?"

"I don't exactly know if I'm bobbish, but I'm certainly in good spirits, for I have heard from some very dear friends, who are on their way to see, and spend the Christmas with us."

L'Estrange turned a sudden glance on Cutbill. It was a mere glance, but it said more than words, and was so inexpressibly sad besides, that the other muttered a hurried good-by and left them.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LONG TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

Pracontal and Longworth sat at breakfast at Freytag's Hotel at Rome. They were splendidly lodged, and the table was spread with all the luxury and abundance which are usually displayed where well-paying guests are treated by wise innkeepers. Fruit and flowers decorated the board, arranged as a painter's eye might have suggested, and nothing was wanting that could gratify the sense of sight or tempt the palate.

"After all," said Longworth, "your song-writer blundered when he wrote 'l'amour.' It is 'l'argent' that 'makes the world go round.' Look at that table, and say what sunshine the morning breaks with, when one doesn't fret about the bill."

"You are right, O Philip," said the other. "Let people say what they may, men love those who

spend money. See what a popularity follows the Empire in France, and what is its chief claim? Just what you said a moment back. It never frets about the bill. Contrast the splendour of such a Government with the mean mercantile spirit of your British Parliament, higgling over contracts and cutting down clerks' salaries, as though the nation were glorified when its servants wore broken boots and patched pantaloons."

"The world needs spendthrifts as it needs tornadoes. The whirlwind purifies even as it devastates."

"How grand you are at an aphorism, Philip. You have all the pomp of the pulpit when you deliver a mere platitude."

"To a Frenchman, everything is a platitude that is not a paradox."

"Go on, your vein is wonderful this morning."

"A Frenchman is the travestie of human nature; every sentiment of his is the parody of what it ought to be. He is grave over trifles, and evokes mirth out of the deepest melancholy; he takes sweet wine with his oysters, and when the post has brought him letters that may actually decide his destiny, he throws

them aside to read a critique on the last ballet, or revive his recollections of its delight by gazing on a coloured print of the ballerina."

"I'm getting tired of the Gitana," said Pracontal, throwing the picture from him; "hand me the chocolate. As to the letters, I have kept them for you to read, for, although I know your spluttering, splashing, hissing language for all purposes of talk, its law jargon is quite beyond me."

"Your lawyer—so far as I have seen—is most careful in his avoidance of technicals with you; he writes clearly and succinctly."

"Break open that great packet, and tell me about its clear and distinct contents."

"I said succinct, not distinct, O man of many mistakes. This is from Kelson himself, and contains an enclosure." He broke the seal as he spoke, and read,—

"DEAR SIR,—I AM exceedingly distressed to be obliged to inform you that the arrangement which, in my last letter, I had understood to be finally and satisfactorily concluded between myself, on your part, and Mr. Sedley, of Furnival's Inn, on the part of

Mr. Bramleigh, is now rescinded and broken, Mr. Bramleigh having entered a formal protest, denying all concurrence or approval, and in evidence of his dissent has actually given notice of action against his solicitor, for unauthorized procedure. The bills therefore drawn by you I herewith return as no longer negociable. I am forced to express not only my surprise, but my indignation, at the mode in which we have been treated in this transaction. Awaiting your instructions as to what step you will deem it advisable to take next,

"I am, dear sir, your obedient servant,

"J. Kelson."

"This is a bad affair," said Longworth. "That twenty thousand that you thought to have lived on for two years, astonishing the vulgar world, like some Count of Monte Christo, has proved a dissolving view, and there you sit a candidate for one of the Pope's prisons, which, if accounts speak truly, are about the vilest dens of squalor and misery in Europe."

"Put a lump of ice in my glass, and fill it up with champagne. It was only yesterday I was think-

ing whether I'd not have myself christened Esau, and it is such a relief to me now to feel that I need not. Monsieur Le Comte Pracontal de Bramleigh, I have the honour to drink your health." As he spoke he drained his glass, and held it out to be refilled.

"No; I'll give you no more wine. You'll need all the calm and consideration you can command to answer this letter, which requires prompt reply. And as to Esau, my friend, the parallel scarcely holds, for when he negotiated the sale of his reversion he was next of kin beyond dispute."

"I wonder what would become of you if you could not cavil. I never knew any man so fond of a contradiction."

"Be just, and admit that you give me some splendid opportunities. No, I'll not let you have more wine. Kelson's letter must be answered, and we must think seriously over what is to be done."

"Ma foi! there is nothing to be done. Mr. Bramleigh challenges me to a duel, because he knows I have no arms. He appeals to the law, which is the very costliest of all the costly things in your dear country. If you could persuade him to believe that

this is not fair—not even generous—perhaps he would have the good manners to quit the premises and send me the key. Short of that, I see nothing to be done."

"I have told you already, and I tell you once more, if Kelson is of opinion that your case is good enough to go to trial, you shall not want funds to meet law expenses."

"He has told me so, over and over. He has said he shall try the case by—what is it you call it?"

"I know what you mean; he will proceed by ejectment to try title."

"This need not cost very heavily, and will serve to open the campaign. He will put me on 'the table,' as he calls it, and I shall be interrogated, and worried, and tormented,—perhaps, too, insulted, at times; and I am to keep my temper, resent nothing —not even when they impugn my honour or my truthfulness—for that there are two grand principles of British law: one is, no man need say any ill of himself, nor is he ever to mind what ill another may say of him."

"Did he tell you that?" said Longworth, laughing.

"Not exactly in these words, but it amounted to the same. Do give me a little wine; I am hoarse with talking."

"Not a drop. Tell me now, where are these letters, and that journal of your grandfather's that you showed me?"

"Kelson has them all. Kelson has everything. When I believed the affair to be ended, I told him he might do what he pleased with them, if he only restored to me that coloured sketch of my beautiful grandmother."

"There, there! don't get emotional, or I have done with you. I will write to Kelson to-day. Leave all to us and don't meddle in any way."

"That you may rely upon with confidence. No one ever yet accused me of occupying myself with anything I could possibly avoid. Do you want me any more?"

"I don't think so; but why do you ask? Where are you going?"

"I have a rendezvous this morning. I am to be three miles from this at one o'clock. I am to be at the tomb of Cecilia Metella, to meet the Lady Augusta Bramleigh, with a large party, on horseback, and we

are to go somewhere and see something, and to dine, ma foi—I forget where."

"I think, all things considered," said Longworth, gravely, "I would advise some reserve as to intimacy with that family."

"You distrust my discretion. You imagine that in my unguarded freedom of talking I shall say many things which had been better unsaid; isn't that so?"

"Perhaps I do; at all events, I know the situation is one that would be intolerable to myself."

"Not to *me* though, not to *me*. It is the very difficulty, the tension, so to say, that makes it enticing. I have I cannot tell you what enjoyment in a position where, by the slightest movement to this side or that, you lose your balance and fall. I like—I delight in the narrow path with the precipice at each hand, where a false step is destruction. The wish to live is never so strong as when life is in danger."

"You are a heart and soul gambler."

"Confess, however, I am 'beau joueur.' I know how to lose." And muttering something over the lateness of the hour, he snatched up his hat and hurried away.

As Pracontal was hurrying to the place of meeting with all the speed of his horse, a servant met him with a note from Lady Augusta. "She did not feel well enough," she said, "for a ride; she had a headache, and begged he would come and pay her a visit, and dine too, if he was not afraid of a dinner en tête-à-tête."

Overjoyed with the familiar tone of this note, he hurried back to Rome, and soon found himself in the little drawing-room which looked out upon the Borghese garden, and where a servant told him her ladyship would soon appear.

"This is very kind of you and very nice," said she, entering and giving him her hand in a languid sort of manner, "to come here and give up the delights of the picnic, with its pretty women and champagne, and pâtés-aux-truffes. No; you are to sit yonder. I don't know you long enough to advance you to the privilege of that low chair next my sofa."

"I am your slave, even to martyrdom," said he, bowing, and sitting down where she had bid him.

"You are aware, I hope," said she, in the same wearied tone, "that it is very wrong of us to become acquainted. That, connected as I am with the

Bramleighs, I ought not to have permitted you to be presented to me. My sister is shocked at the impropriety, and as for Lord and Lady Culduff, rather than meet you at dinner on Friday they have left Rome."

"Left Rome?"

"Yes, gone to Naples. To be sure, he ought to have been there a month ago; he was accredited to that Court, and he had nothing to do here, which was, however, to *him* an excellent reason for being here. Why do you make me talk so much? it sets my head splitting, and I sent for you to listen to you, and not to have any worry of talking myself—there, begin."

"What shall I talk about?"

"Anything you like, only not politics, or religion, or literature, or fine arts—people are so unnatural when they discuss these; nor—not society and gossip, for then they grow spiteful and ill-natured; nor about myself, for then you'd fancy you were in love with me, and I'd have to shut the door against you. Oh, how my head aches! Give me that flacon, pray; thanks, now go back to your place."

"Shall I read to you?"

"No: there's nothing I detest so much as being

read to. One never follows the book; it is the tone and accent of the reader, something in his voice, something one fancies an affectation attracts attention, and you remark how his hair is parted, or how his boots are made. Oh, why *will* you torment me this way—I don't want to talk and you persist in asking me questions."

"If you had not a headache I'd sing for you."

"No, I'll not let you sing to me alone; that would be quite wrong. Remember, monsieur, and when I say remember, I mean never forget, I am excessively prude; not of that school of prudery that repels, but of that higher tone which declares a freedom impossible. Do you comprehend?"

"Perfectly, madame," said he, bowing with an air of an ideal reverence.

"Now, then, that we have settled the preliminaries of our—oh, dear!" burst she out, "see what it is to be speaking French! I had almost said of 'our friendship.'"

"And why not, madame? Can you possibly entertain a doubt of that sentiment, at once devoted and respectful, which has brought me to your feet?"

"I never do doubt about anything that I want to

believe; at least till I change my mind on it, for I am—yes, I am very capricious. I am charmed with you to-day; but do not be surprised if my servant shuts the door against you to-morrow."

"Madame, you drive me to the brink of despair."

"I'm sure of that," said she, laughing. "I have driven several that far; but, strange to say, I never knew one who went over."

"Do not push torture to insufferance, madame," cried he, theatrically; but, instead of laughing at him, she looked really alarmed at his words.

"Oh, Monsieur Pracontal," cried she, suddenly, "was that little song you sung last night your own? I mean, words and music both?"

He bowed with an air of modesty.

"What a nice talent, to be able to compose and write verses too! But they tell me you are horribly satirical; that you make rhymes on people impromptu, and sing them in the very room with them."

"Only, madame, when they are, what you call in English, bores."

"But I like bores, they are so nice and dull. Do you know, Monsieur Pracontal, if it were not for bores, we English would have no distinctive nation-

ality? Our bores are essentially our own, and unlike all the other species of the creature elsewhere."

"I respect them, and I bow to their superiority."

"It was very kind, very nice of you, to give up your ride over the Campagna, and come here to sit with me in one of my dull moods, for to-day I am very dull and dispirited. I have an odious headache, and my sister has been scolding me, and I have had such unpleasant letters. Altogether, it is a dark day with me."

"I am inexpressibly grieved."

"Of course you are; and so I told my sister you would be, when she said it was a great imprudence on my part to admit you. Not that I don't agree with her in great part, but I do detest being dictated to; isn't it insupportable."

"Quite so; the very worst form of slavery."

"It's true you want to take away the Bramleigh estates; but, as I said to my sister, does not every one wish to win when he plays a game, and do you detest your adversary for so natural a desire? I suppose if you have a trump more than the Bramleighs you'll carry off the stakes."

"Ah, madame, how glad would I be to lay my

cards on the table, if I could be sure of such an opponent as yourself."

"Yes, I *am* generous. It's the one thing I can say for myself. I'm all for fighting the battle of life honourably and courteously, though I must say one is sure to lose where the others are not equally high-minded. Now I put it to yourself, M. Pracontal, and I ask, Was it fair, was it honest, was it decent of Colonel Bramleigh, knowing the insecure title by which he held his estate, to make me his wife? You know, of course, the difference of rank that separated us; you know who I was—I can't say am, because my family have never forgiven me the mésalliance; therefore, I say, was it not atrocious in him to make a settlement which he felt must be a mockery?"

"Perhaps, madame, he may have regarded our pretensions as of little moment; indeed, I believe, he treated my father's demands with much hauteur."

"Still he knew there was a claim, and a claimant, when he married *me;* and this can neither be denied nor defended."

"Ah, madame!" sighed he, "who would be stopped by scruples in such a cause?"

"No, no, there was nothing of love in it; he

wanted rank, he wanted high connections. He was fond of me, after his fashion, I've no doubt, but he was far more proud than fond. I often fancied he must have had something on his mind, he would be so abstracted at times and so depressed, and then he would seem as if he wanted to tell me a secret but had not the courage for it, and I set it down to something quite different. I thought—no matter what I thought—but it gave me no uneasiness, for, of course, I never dreamed of being jealous; but that it should be so bad as this never occurred to me—never!"

"I am only surprised that Colonel Bramleigh never thought it worth his while to treat with my father, who, all things considered, would have been easily dealt with; he was always a pauvre diable, out of one scrape to fall into another; so reckless that the very smallest help ever seemed to him quite sufficient to brave life with."

"I know nothing of the story, tell it to me."

"It is very long, very tiresome, and encumbered with details of dates and eras. I doubt you'd have patience for it, but if you think you would, I'm ready."

"Begin then, only don't make it more confused

or more tangled than you can help; and give me no dates—I hate dates."

Pracontal was silent for a moment or two as if reflecting, and then, drawing his chair a little nearer to her sofa, he leaned his forehead on his hand, and in a low, but distinct voice, began:—

"When Colonel Bramleigh's father was yet a young man, a matter of business required his presence in Ireland; he came to see a very splendid mansion then being built by a rich nobleman, on which his house had advanced a large sum by way of mortgage."

"Mon cher M. Pracontal, must we begin so far back? It is like the Plaideur in Molière who commences, 'Quand je vois le soleil, quand je vois la lune—'"

"Very true, but I must begin at the beginning of all things, and, with a little patience, I'll soon get further. Mr. Montagu Bramleigh made acquaintance in Ireland with a certain Italian painter called Giacomo Lami, who had been brought over from Rome to paint the frescoes of this great house. This Lami—very poor, and very humble, ignoble if you like to say so—had a daughter of surpassing beauty. She was so very lovely that Giacomo was accustomed

to introduce her into almost all his frescoes, for she had such variety of expression, so many 'reflets,' as one may say, of character in her look, that she was a Madonna here, a Flora there, now a Magdalene, now a Dido; but you need not take my word for it, here she is as a Danaë." And he opened his watch-case as he spoke, and displayed a small miniature in enamel of marvellous beauty and captivation.

"Oh, was she really like this?"

"That was copied from a picture of her at St. Servain, when she was eighteen, immediately before she accompanied her father to Ireland; and in Giacomo's sketch-book, which I hope one of these days to have the honour of showing to you, there is a memorandum saying that this portrait of Enrichetta was the best likeness of her he had ever made. He had a younger daughter called Carlotta, also handsome, but vastly inferior in beauty to my grandmother."

"Your grandmother?"

"Forgive me, madame, if I have anticipated; but Enrichetta Lami became the wife of Montagu Bramleigh. The young man, captivated by her marvellous beauty, and enchanted by a winning grace of manner,

in which it appears she excelled, made his court to her and married her. The ceremony of marriage presented no difficulty, as Lami was a member of some sect of Waldensean Protestants, who claim a sort of affinity with the Anglican Church, and they were married in the parish church by the minister, and duly registered in the registry-book of the parish. All these matters are detailed in this book of Giacomo Lami's, which was at once account-book and sketch-book and journal, and, indeed, family history. It is a volume will, I am sure, amuse you, for, amongst sketches and studies for pictures, there are the drollest little details of domestic events, with passing notices of the political circumstances of the time—for old Giacomo was a conspirator and a Carbonaro, and heaven knows what else. He even involved himself in the Irish troubles, and was so far compromised that he was obliged to fly the country and get over to Holland, which he did, taking his two daughters with him. It has never been clearly ascertained whether Montagu Bramleigh had quarrelled with his wife or consented to her accompanying her father, for, while there were letters from him to her full of affection and regard, there are some strange

passages in Giacomo's diary that seem to hint at estrangement and coldness. When her child, my father, was born, she pressed Bramleigh strongly to come over to the christening; but, though he promised at first, and appeared overjoyed at the birth of his heir, he made repeated pretexts of this or that engagement, and ended by not coming. Old Lami must have given way to some outburst of anger at this neglect and desertion, for he sent back Bramleigh's letters unopened; and the poor Enrichetta, after struggling bravely for several months under this heartless and cruel treatment, sunk and died. The old man wandered away towards the south of Europe after this, taking with him his grandchild and his remaining daughter; and the first entry we find in his diary is about three years later, where we read, 'Chambéry,—Must leave this, where I thought I had at last found a home. Niccolo Baldassare is bent on gaining Carlotta's affections. Were they to marry it would be the ruin of both. Each has the same faults as the other.'

"And later on,—

"'Had an explanation with N. B., who declares that, with or without my consent, he will make C.

his wife. I have threatened to bring him before the Council; but he defies me, and says he is ready to abandon the society rather than give her up. I must quit this secretly and promptly.'

"We next find him at Treviso, where he was painting the Basilica of St. Guedolfo, and here he speaks of himself as a lonely old man, deserted and forsaken, showing that his daughter had left him some time before. He alludes to offers that had been made him to go to England; but declares that nothing would induce him to set foot in that country more. One passage would imply that Carlotta, on leaving home, took her sister's boy with her, for in the old man's writing there are these words,—

"'I do not want to hear more of them; but I would wish tidings of the boy. I have dreamed of him twice.'

"From that time forth the journal merely records the places he stopped at, the works he was engaged in, and the sums he received in payment. For the most part, his last labours were in out-of-the-way, obscure spots, where he worked for mere subsistence; and of how long he lived there, and where he died, there is no trace.

"Do I weary you, my dear lady, with these small details of very humble people, or do you really bestow any interest on my story?"

"I like it of all things. I only want to follow Carlotta's history now, and learn what became of her."

"Of her fate and fortune I know nothing. Indeed, all that I have been telling you heretofore I have gleaned from that book and some old letters of my great-grandfather's. My own history I will not inflict upon you—at least not now. I was a student of the Naval College of Genoa till I was fourteen, and called Anatole Pracontal, 'dit' Lami; but who had entered me on the books of the college, who paid for me or interested himself about me, I never knew.

"A boyish scrape I fell into induced me to run away from the college. I took refuge in a small felucca, which landed me at Algiers, where I entered the French service, and made two campaigns with Pélissier; and only quitted the army on learning that my father had been lost at sea, and had bequeathed me some small property, then in the hands of a banker at Naples.

"The property was next to nothing, but by the papers and letters that I found, I learned who I was, and to what station and fortune I had legitimate claim. It seems a small foundation, perhaps, to build upon; but remember how few the steps are in reality, and how direct besides. My grandmother, Enrichetta, was the married wife of Montagu Bramleigh; her son—Godfrey Lami at his birth, but afterwards known by many aliases — married my mother, Marie de Pracontal, a native of Savoy, where I was born, the name Pracontal being given me. My father's correspondence with the Bramleighs was kept up at intervals during his life, and frequent mention is made in diaries, as well as the banker's books, of sums of money received by him from them. In Bolton's hands, also, was deposited my father's will, where he speaks of me and the claim which I should inherit on the Bramleigh estates; and he earnestly entreats Bolton, who had so often befriended him, to succour his poor boy, and not leave him without help and counsel in the difficulties that were before him.

"Have you followed, or can you follow, the tangled scheme?" cried he, after a pause; "for

you are either very patient or completely exhausted—which is it?"

"But why have you taken the name of Pracontal, and not your real name, Bramleigh?" asked she, eagerly.

"By Bolton's advice, in the first instance, he wisely taking into account how rich the family were whose right I was about to question, and how poor I was. Bolton inclined to a compromise, and, indeed, he never ceased to press upon me that it would be the fairest and most generous of all arrangements; but that to effect this, I must not shock the sensibilities of the Bramleighs by assuming their name—that to do so was to declare war at once."

"And yet had you called yourself Bramleigh, you would have warned others that the right of the Bramleighs to this estate was at least disputed."

Pracontal could scarcely repress a smile at a declaration so manifestly prompted by selfish considerations; but he made no reply.

"Well, and this compromise, do they agree to it?" asked she, hastily.

"Some weeks ago, I believed it was all concluded; but this very morning my lawyer's letter

tells me that Augustus Bramleigh will not hear of it, that he is indignant at the very idea, and that the law alone must decide between us."

"What a scandal!"

"So I thought. Worse, of course, for them, who are in the world and well known. I am a nobody."

"A nobody, who might be somebody to-morrow," said she, slowly and deliberately.

"After all, the stage of pretension is anything but pleasant, and I cannot but regret that we have not come to some arrangement."

"Can *I* be of use? Could *my* services be employed to any advantage?"

"At a moment, I cannot answer; but I am very grateful for even the thought."

"I cannot pretend to any influence with the family. Indeed, none of them ever liked me; but they might listen to me, and they might also believe that *my* interest went with their own. Would you like to meet Augustus Bramleigh?"

"There is nothing I desire so much."

"I'll not promise he'll come; but if he should consent, will you come here on Tuesday morning—

say, at eleven o'clock—and meet him? I know he's expected at Albano by Sunday, and I'll have a letter to propose the meeting, in his hands, on his arrival."

"I have no words to speak my gratitude to you."

CHAPTER XXII.

A SPECIAL MISSION.

When a very polite note from Lord Culduff to Mr. Cutbill expressed the deep regret he felt at not being able to receive that gentleman at dinner, as an affair of much moment required his immediate presence at Naples, the noble lord was more correct than it was his usual fate to be in matters of apology. The fact was, that his lordship had left England several weeks before, charged with a most knotty and difficult mission to the Neapolitan court; and though the question involved the misery of imprisonment to some of the persons concerned, and had called forth more than one indignant appeal for information in the House, the great diplomatist sauntered leisurely over the Continent, stopping to chat with a Minister here, or dine with a reigning Prince there, not suffering himself to be hurried by the business before him, or

in any way influenced by the petulant despatches and telegrams which F. O. persistently sent after him.

One of his theories was, that in diplomacy everything should be done in a sort of dignified languor that excluded all thought of haste or of emergency. "Haste implies pressure," he would say, "and pressure means weakness: therefore, always seem slow, occasionally even to indolence."

There was no denying it, he was a great master in that school of his art which professed to baffle every effort at inquiry. No man ever wormed a secret from him that he desired to retain, or succeeded in entrapping him into any accidental admission. He could talk for hours with a frankness that was positively charming. He could display a candour that seemed only short of indiscretion; and yet, when you left him, you found you had carried away nothing beyond some neatly turned aphorisms, and a few very harmless imitations of Macchiavellian subtlety. Like certain men who are fond of showing how they can snuff a candle with a bullet, he was continually exhibiting his skill at fence, with the added assurance that nothing would grieve him so ineffably as any display of his ability at your expense.

He knew well that these subtleties were no longer the mode; that men no longer tried to outwit each other in official intercourse; that the time for such feats of smartness had as much gone by as the age of high neckcloths and tight coats; but yet, as he adhered to the old dandyism of the Regency in his dress, he maintained the old traditions of finesse in his diplomacy, and could no more have been betrayed into a Truth than he could have worn a Jim Crow. For that mere plodding, commonplace race of men that now filled "the line" he had the most supreme contempt; men who had never uttered a smart thing' or written a clever one. Diplomacy without epigram was like a dinner without truffles. It was really pleasant to hear him speak of the great days of Metternich and Nesselrode and Talleyrand, when a frontier was settled by a bon mot, and a dynasty decided by a doggerel. The hoarse roar of the multitude had not in those times disturbed the polished solemnity of the council-chamber, and the high-priests of statecraft celebrated their mysteries unmolested.

"The ninth telegram, by lord," said Temple, as he stood with a cipher despatch in his hand, just as Lord Culduff had reached his hotel at Naples.

"Transcribe it, my dear boy, and let us hear it."

"I have, my lord. It runs, 'Where is the special envoy? Let him report himself by telegraph.'"

"Reply, 'At dinner, at the Hôtel Victoria; in passably good health, and indifferent spirits.'"

"But, my lord——"

"There, you'd better dress. You are always late. And tell the people here to serve oysters every day till I countermand them; and taste the Capri, please; I prefer it to Sauterne, if it be good. The telegram can wait."

"I was going to mention, my lord, that Prince Castelmuro has called twice to-day, and begged he might be informed of your arrival. Shall I write him a line?"

"No. The request must be replied to by him to whom it was addressed,—the landlord perhaps, or the laquais-de-place."

"The King is most anxious to learn if you have come."

"His Majesty shall be rewarded for his courteous impatience. I shall ask an audience to-morrow."

"They told me dinner was served," said Lady

Culduff, angrily, as she entered the room, dressed as if for a court entertainment; "and I hurried down without putting on my gloves."

"Let me kiss your ladyship's hand so temptingly displayed," said he, stooping and pressing it to his lips.

An impatient gesture of the shoulder, and a saucy curl of the lip were the only response to this gallantry.

A full half-hour before Lord Culduff appeared Temple Bramleigh re-entered, dressed for dinner.

"Giacomo is at his old tricks, Temple," said she, as she walked the room impatiently. "His theory is that every one is to be in waiting on my lord; and I have been here now close on three-quarters of an hour, expecting dinner to be announced. Will you please to take some trouble about the household, or let us have an attaché who will?"

"Giacomo is impossible—that's the fact; but it's no use saying so."

"I know that," said she, with a malicious twinkle of the eye. "The man who is so dexterous with rouge and pomatum cannot be spared. But can you tell me, Temple, why we came here? There was no

earthly reason to quit a place that suited us perfectly because Lady Augusta Bramleigh wished to do us an impertinence."

"Oh, but we ought to have been here six weeks ago! They are frantic at 'the Office' at our delay, and there will be a precious to-do about it in the House."

"Culduff likes that. If he has moments that resemble happiness, they are those when he is so palpably in the wrong that they would ruin any other man than himself."

"Well, he has got one of them now, I can tell you."

"Oh, I am aware of what you diplomatic people call great emergencies, critical conjunctures, and the like; but as Lord Watermore said the other evening, 'all your falls are like those in the circus—you always come down upon saw-dust.'"

"There's precious little saw-dust here. It's a case will make a tremendous noise in England. When a British subject has been ironed and——"

"Am I late? I shall be in despair, my lady, if I have kept you waiting," said Lord Culduff, entering in all the glory of red ribbon and Guelph, and with

an unusually brilliant glow of youth and health in his features.

It was with a finished gallantry that he offered his arm; and his smile, as he led her to the dinner-room, was triumph itself. What a contrast to the moody discontent on *her* face; for she did not even affect to listen to his excuses, or bestow the slightest attention on his little flatteries and compliments. During the dinner Lord Culduff alone spoke. He was agreeable after his manner, which was certainly a very finished manner; and he gave little reminiscences of the last time he had been at Naples, and the people he had met, sketching their eccentricities and oddities most amusingly, for he was a master in those light touches of satire which deal with the ways of society, and, perhaps, to any one but his wife he would have been most entertaining and pleasant. She never deigned the very faintest recognition of what he said. She neither smiled when he was witty, nor looked shocked at his levities. Only once, when, by a direct appeal to her, silence was impossible, she said, with a marked spitefulness, "You are talking of something very long ago. I think I heard of that when I was a child." There was a glow under his lordship's rouge as he

raised his glass to his lips, and an almost tremor in his voice when he spoke again.

"I'm afraid you don't like Naples, my lady?"

"I detest it."

"The word is strong; let it be my care to try and induce you to recall it."

"It will be lost time, my lord. I always hated the place and the people too."

"You were pleased with Rome, I think?"

"And that possibly was the reason we left it. I mean," said she, blushing with shame at the rudeness that had escaped her, "I mean that one is always torn away from the place they are content to live in. It is the inevitable destiny,"

"Very pleasant claret that for hotel wine," said Lord Culduff, passing the bottle to Temple. "The small race of travellers who frequent the Continent now rarely call for the better wines, and the consequence is that Margaux and Marcobrunner get that time to mature in the cellars, which was denied to them in former times."

A complete silence now ensued. At last Lord Culduff said, "Shall we have coffee?" and offering his arm with the same courteous gallantry as before,

he led Lady Culduff into the drawing-room, bowing as he relinquished her hand, as though he stood in presence of a queen. "I know you are very tolerant," said he, with a bewitching smile, "and as we shall have no visitors this evening, may I ask the favour of being permitted a cigarette—only one?"

"As many as you like. I am going to my room, my lord." And ere he could hasten to open the door, she swept haughtily out of the room and disappeared.

"We must try and make Naples pleasant for my lady," said Lord Culduff, as he drew his chair to the fire; but there was, somehow, a malicious twinkle in his eye and a peculiar curl of the lip as he spoke that scarcely vouched for the loyalty of his words; and that Temple heard him with distrust seemed evident by his silence. "You'd better go over to the Legation and say we have arrived. If Blagden asks when he may call, tell him at two to-morrow. Let them send over all the correspondence; and I think we shall want some one out of the chancellerie. Whom have they got? Throw your eye over the list."

Opening a small volume bound in red morocco, Temple read out, "Minister and envoy, Sir Geoffrey

Blagden, K.C.B.; first secretary, Mr. Tottenham; second secretaries, Ralph Howard, the Hon. Edward Eccles, and W. Thornton; third secretary, George Hilliard; attaché, Christopher Stepney."

"I only know one of these men; indeed, I can scarcely say I know him. I knew his father, or his grandfather perhaps. At all events, take some one who writes a full hand, with the letters very upright, and who seldom speaks, and never has a cold in his head."

"You don't care for any one in particular?" asked Temple, meekly.

"Of course not; no more than for the colour of the horse in a hansom. If Blagden hints anything about dining with him, say I don't dine out; though I serve her Majesty, I do not mean to destroy my constitution; and I know what a Legation dinner means, with a Scotchman for the chief of the mission. I'm so thankful he is not married, or we should have his wife calling on my lady. You can dine there if you like; indeed, perhaps, you ought. If Blagden has an opera-box, say my lady likes the theatre. I think that's all. Stay, don't let him pump you about my going to Vienna; and drop in on me when you come back."

Lord Culduff was fast asleep in a deep arm-chair before his dressing-room fire when Temple returned. The young man looked wearied and worn out, as well he might; for the Minister had insisted on going over the whole "question" to him, far less, indeed, for his information or instruction, than to justify every step the Legation had taken, and to show the utter unfairness and ungenerosity of the Foreign Office in sending out a special mission to treat a matter which the accredited envoy was already bringing to a satisfactory conclusion.

"No, no, my dear boy, no blue-books, no correspondence. I shook my religious principles in early life by reading Gibbon, and I never was quite sure of my grammar since I studied diplomatic despatches. Just tell me the matter as you'd tell a scandal or a railway accident."

"Where shall I begin then?"

"Begin where *we* come in."

"Ah, but I can't tell where that is. You know, of course, that there was a filibustering expedition which landed on the coast, and encountered the revenue guard, and overpowered them, and were in turn attacked, routed, and captured by the Royal troops."

"Ta, ta, ta! I don't want all that. Come down to the events of June—June 27 they call it."

"Well, it was on that day when the *Ercole* was about to get under weigh, with two hundred of these fellows sentenced to the galleys for life, that a tremendous storm broke over the Bay of Naples. Since the memorable hurricane of '92 there had been nothing like it. The sea-wall of the Chiaja was washed away, and a frigate was cast on shore at Caserta with her bowsprit in the palace windows; all the lower town was under water, and many lives lost. But the damage at sea was greatest of all: eight fine ships were lost, the crews having, with some few exceptions, perished with them."

"Can't we imagine a great disaster—a very great disaster? I'll paint my own storm, so pray go on."

"Amongst the merchant shipping was a large American barque which rode out the gale, at anchor, for several hours; but, as the storm increased, her captain, who was on shore, made signal to the mate to slip his cable and run for safety to Castellamare. The mate, a young Englishman, named Rogers——"

"Samuel Rogers?"

"The same, my lord, though it is said not to be

his real name. He, either misunderstanding the signal—or, as some say, wilfully mistaking its meaning—took to his launch, with the eight men he had with him, and rowed over to a small despatch-boat of the Royal Navy, which was to have acted as convoy to the *Ercole*, but whose officers were unable to get on board of her, so that she was actually under the command of a petty officer. Rogers boarded her, and proposed to the man in command to get up steam, and try to save the lives of the people who were perishing on every hand. He refused: an altercation ensued, and the English—for they were all English—overpowered them and sent them below——"

"Don't say under hatches, my dear boy, or I shall expect to see you hitching your trousers next."

Temple reddened, but went on: "They got up steam in all haste, and raised their anchor, but only at the instant that the *Ercole* foundered, quite close to them, and the whole sea was covered with the soldiers and the galley-slaves, who had jumped overboard, and the ship went down. Rogers made for them at once and rescued above a hundred—chiefly of the prisoners—but he saved also many of the crew, and the soldiers. From four o'clock till nigh seven,

he continued to cruise back and forward through the bay, assisting every one who needed help, and saving life on every side. As the gale abated, yielding to the piteous entreaties of the prisoners, whom he well knew were political offenders, he landed them all near Baia, and was quietly returning to the mooring-ground whence he had taken the despatch-boat, when he was boarded by two armed boats' crews of the Royal Navy, ironed and carried off to prison."

"That will do, I know the rest. Blagden asked to have them tried in open court, and was told that the trial was over, and that they had been condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted by royal mercy to hard labour at the galleys. I knew your long story before you told it, but listened to hear what new element you might have interpolated since you saw the people at the Legation. I find you, on the whole, very correct. How the Neapolitan Government and H. M.'s Ministers have mistaken, mystified, and slanged each other; how they have misinterpreted law and confounded national right; how they have danced a reel through all justice, and changed places with each other some half-dozen times, so that an arbiter—if there were one—would

put them both out of court—I have read already in the private correspondence. Even the people in Parliament, patent bunglers as they are in foreign customs, began to ask themselves, Is Filangieri in the pay of her Majesty? and how comes it that Blagden is in the service of Naples?"

"Oh, it's not so bad as that!"

"Yes, it's fully as bad as that. Such a muddled correspondence was probably never committed to print. They thought it a controversy, but the combatants never confronted each other. One appealed to humanity, the other referred to the law; one went off in heroics about gallantry, and the other answered by the galleys. People ought to be taught that diplomatists do not argue, or if they do, they are mere tyros at their trade. Diplomatists insinuate, suppose, suggest, hope, fear, and occasionally threaten; and with these they take in a tolerably wide sweep of human motives. There, go to bed now, my dear boy; you have had enough of precepts for one evening; tell Giacomo not to disturb me before noon,—I shall probably write late into the night."

Temple bowed and took his leave, but scarcely had he reached the stairs than Lord Culduff laid

himself in his bed and went off into a sound sleep. Whether his rest was disturbed by dreams; whether his mind went over the crushing things he had in store for the Neapolitan Minister, or the artful excuses he intended to write home; whether he composed sonorous sentences for a blue-book, or invented witty epigrams for a "private and confidential;" or whether he only dreamed of a new preparation of glycerine and otto of roses, which he had seen advertised as an "invaluable accessory to the toilet," this history does not, perhaps need not, record.

As, however, we are not about to follow the course of his diplomatic efforts in our next chapter, it is pleasant to take leave of him in his repose.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHURCH PATRONS.

As the season drew to its close at Albano, and the period of returning to Rome approached, the church committee, following the precedent of all previous years, fell out, and held a succession of vestry-meetings for mutual abuse and recrimination. Partisanship is the badge of church patrons, and while the parson had his adherents, and the organist his supporters, there were half a dozen very warm friends who advocated the cause of the bell-ringer—a drunken little heathen, who, because he had never crossed the threshold of a Catholic church for years, was given brevet rank as a member of the Reformed religion.

The time of auditing the church accounts is usually a sort of day of judgment on the clergyman. All the complaints that can be preferred against him are kept for that occasion. A laudable sentiment

possibly prompts men to ascertain what they have got for their money: at all events, people in nowise remarkable for personal thrift show at such times a most searching spirit of inquiry, and eagerly investigate the cost of sweeping out the vestry and clear-starching the chaplain's bands.

As to the doctrine of the parson, and the value of his ministration, there were a variety of opinions. He was too high for this one, too dry for that; he was not impressive, not solemn nor dignified with some, while others deemed him deficient in that winning familiarity which is so soothing to certain sinners. Some thought his sermons too high-flown and too learned, others asked why he only preached to the children in the gallery. On one only point was there anything like unanimity: each man who withdrew his subscription did so on principle. None, not one, referred his determination to contribute no longer to any motive of economy. All declared that it was something in the celebration of the service—a doctrine inculcated in the pulpit—something the parson had said or something he had worn—obliged them, "with infinite regret," to withdraw what they invariably called "their mite." In fact, one thing

was clear: a more high-minded, right-judging, scrupulous body of people could not be found than the congregation, whatever might be said or thought of him whose duty it was to guide them.

Lady Augusta Bramleigh had gone off to Rome, and a small three-cornered note, highly perfumed, and most nervously written, informed the committee that she was quite ready to continue her former subscription, or more, if required; that she was charmed with the chaplain, pleased with the choir, and generally delighted with every one—a testimony more delicately valuable from the fact that she had been but once to church during the entire season.

Sir Marcus Cluff, after reading out the letter, took occasion to observe on the ventilation of the church, which was defective in many respects. There was a man in King Street—he thought his name was Harmond or something like Harmond, but it might be Fox—who had invented a self-revolving pane for church windows; it was perfectly noiseless, and the cost a mere trifle, though it required to be adjusted by one of the patentee's own people; some mistakes having occurred by blundering adaptation, by which two persons had been asphyxiated at Redhill.

The orator was here interrupted by Mrs. Trumpler, who stoutly affirmed that she had come there that day at great inconvenience, and was in nowise prepared to listen to a discourse upon draughts, or the rival merits of certain plumbers. There were higher considerations than these that might occupy them, and she wished to know if M. L'Estrange was prepared to maintain the harsh, and she must say the ungenerous and unscholarlike view he had taken of the character of Judas. If so, she withdrew her subscription, but added that she would also in a pamphlet explain to the world the reasons of her retirement, as well as the other grounds of complaint she had against the chaplain.

One humble contributor of fifteen francs alleged that, though nutcrackers were a useful domestic implement, they formed an unpleasant accompaniment to the hymns, and occasionally startled devotionally minded persons during the service; and he added his profound regret at the seeming apathy of the clergyman to the indecent interruption; indeed, he had seen the parson sitting in the reading-desk, while these disturbances continued, to all appearance unmoved and indifferent.

A retired victualler, Mr. Mowser, protested that to see the walk of the clergyman, as he came up the aisle, "was enough for *him;*" and he had only come to the meeting to declare that he himself had gone over to the sect of the Nuremberg Christians, who, at least, were humble-minded and lowly, and who thought their pastor handsomely provided for with a thousand francs a year and a suit of black clothes at Christmas.

In a word, there was much discontent abroad, and a very general opinion seemed to prevail that, what with the increasing dearness of butchers' meat, and an extra penny lately added to the income-tax, it behoved every one to see what wise and safe economy could be introduced into their affairs. It is needless to say how naturally it suggested itself to each that the church subscription was a retrenchment at once practicable and endurable.

Any one who wishes to convince himself how dear to the Protestant heart is the right of private judgment, has only to attend a vestry meeting of a church supported on the voluntary system. It is the very grandest assertion of that great principle. There is not a man there represented by ten francs'

annual subscription who has not very decided opinions of the doctrine he requires for his money; and thus, while no one agreed with his neighbour, all concurred in voting that they deemed the chaplain had not fulfilled their expectations, and that they reserved their right to contribute or not for the ensuing year, as future thought and consideration should determine.

L'Estrange had gone in to Rome to meet Augustus Bramleigh and Ellen, who were coming to pass the Christmas with him, when Sir Marcus Cluff called to announce this unpleasant resolution of the church patrons.

"Perhaps I could see Miss L'Estrange?" said he to the servant, who had said her master was from home.

Julia was seated working at the window as Sir Marcus entered the room.

"I hope I do not come at an unseemly hour; I scarcely know the time one ought to visit here," he began, as he fumbled to untie the strings of his respirator. "How nice and warm your room is; and a south aspect, too. Ah! that's what my house fails in."

"I'm so sorry my brother is not at home, Sir Marcus. He will regret not meeting you."

"And I'm sorry, too. I could have broken the bad news to him, perhaps, better than—I mean—oh, dear! if I begin coughing, I shall never cease. Would you mind my taking my drops? They are only aconite and lettuce; and if I might ask for a little fresh water. I'm so sorry to be troublesome."

Though all anxiety to know to what bad news he referred, she hastened to order the glass of water he desired, and calmly resumed her seat.

"It's spasmodic, this cough. I don't know if that be any advantage, or the reverse; but the doctor says 'only spasmodic,' which would lead one to suppose it might be worse. Would you do me the great favour to drop thirty-five, be sure only thirty-five, of these? I hope your hand does not shake."

"No, Sir Marcus. It is very steady."

"What a pretty hand it is. How taper your fingers are, but you have these dimples at the knuckles they say are such signs of cruelty."

"Oh, Sir Marcus!"

"Yes, they say so. Nana Sahib had them, and

that woman—there, there, you have given me thirty-seven."

"No, I assure you, Sir Marcus; only thirty-five. I'm a practised hand at dropping medicine. My brother used to have violent headaches."

"And you always measured his drops, did you?"

"Always. I'm quite a clever nurse, I assure you."

"Oh, dear! do you say so?" And as he laid down his glass he looked at her with an expression of interest and admiration, which pushed her gravity to its last limit.

"I don't believe a word about the cruelty they ascribe to those dimples. I pledge you my word of honour I do not," said he, seriously.

"I'm sincerely glad to hear you say so," said she, trying to seem grave.

"And is your brother much of an invalid?"

"Not now. The damp climate of Ireland gave him headaches, but he rarely has them here."

"Ah, and you have such a quiet way of moving about; that gentle gliding step, so soothing to the sick. Oh, you don't know what a boon it is; and the common people never have it, nor can they

acquire it. When you went to ring the bell, I said to myself, 'That's it: that's what all the teaching in the world cannot impart.'"

"You will make me very vain, Sir Marcus. All the more that you give me credit for merits I never suspected."

"Have you a cold hand?" asked he, with a look of eagerness.

"I really don't know. Perhaps I have."

"If I might dare. Ah," said he, with much feeling, as he touched her hand in the most gentle manner—"Ah! that is the greatest gift of nature. A small hand, perfect in form, beautiful in colour, and cold as marble."

Julia could resist no longer, but laughed out one of those pleasant merry laughs whose music make an echo in the heart.

"I know well enough what you are saying to yourself. I think I hear you muttering, 'What an original, what a strange creature it is;' and so I am, I won't deny it. One who has been an invalid for eighteen years; eighteen years passed in the hard struggle with an indolent alimentary system, for they say it's no more. There's nothing organic;

nothing whatever. Structurally, said Dr. Borcas of Leamington, structurally you are as sound as a roach. I don't fully appreciate the comparison, but I take it the roach must be a very healthy fish. Oh, here's your brother coming across the garden. I wish he had not come just yet; I had a—no matter, perhaps you'd permit me to have a few words with you to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, or whenever you like, Sir Marcus, but pray forgive me if I run away now to ask my brother if our visitors have come."

"They'll be here to-morrow evening, Ju," said George, as she rushed to meet him. "Is that Cluff's phaeton I see at the gate?"

"Yes; the tiresome creature has been here the last hour. I'll not go back to him. You must take your share now."

By the time L'Estrange entered the room, Sir Marcus had replaced his respirator, and enveloped himself in two of his overcoats and a fur boa. "Oh, here you are," said he, speaking with much difficulty. "I can't talk now; it brings on the cough. Come over in the evening, and I'll tell you about it."

"About what pray?" asked the other curtly.

"There's no use being angry. It only hurries the respiration, and chokes the pulmonary vessels. They won't give a sixpence—not one of them. They say that you don't preach St. Paul—that you think too much about works. I don't know what they don't say; but come over about seven."

"Do you mean that the subscribers have withdrawn from the church?"

Sir Marcus had not breath for further discussion, but made a gesture of assent with his head.

L'Estrange sank down on a chair overpowered, nor did he speak to, or notice, the other as he withdrew.

"Are you ill, dearest George?" said Julia, as she saw her brother pale and motionless on the chair. "Are you ill?"

"They've all withdrawn from the church, Julia. Cluff says they are dissatisfied with me, and will contribute no longer."

"I don't believe it's so bad as he says. I'm sure it's not. They cannot be displeased with you, George. It's some mere passing misconception. You know how they're given to these little bickerings and squabbles; but they have ever been kind and friendly to you."

"You always give me courage, Ju; and even when I have little heart for it, I like it,"

"Come in to dinner now, George; and if I don't make you laugh, it's a wonder to me. I have had such a scene with Sir Marcus as might have graced a comedy."

It was not an easy task to rally her brother back to good spirits, but she did succeed at last. "And now," said she, as she saw him looking once more at ease and cheerful, "what news of the Bramleighs—are they ever to come?"

"They'll be here to-morrow evening, Ju. Unless they were quite sure the Culduffs had left for Naples, they would not venture here; and perhaps they were so far in the right."

"I don't think so; at least, if I had been Nelly, I'd have given anything for such an opportunity of presenting myself to my distinguished relations and terrifying them by the thought of those attentions that they can neither give me nor deny me."

"No, no, Julia, nothing of the kind; there would be malice in that."

"Do I deny it? A great deal of malice in it, and there's no good comedy in life without a slight

flavour of spitefulness. Oh, my poor dear George, what a deep sigh that was! How sad it is to think that all your example and all your precept do so little, and that your sister acquires nothing by your companionship except the skill to torment you."

"But why will you say those things that you don't mean—that you couldn't feel?"

"I believe I do it, George, just the way a horse bounds and rears and buck-leaps. It does not help him on his road, but it lightens the journey; and then it offers such happy occasion for the exercise of that nice light hand of my brother to check these aberrations. You ought to be eternally grateful for the way I develope your talents as a moralist—I was going to say a horse-breaker.

"I suppose," said he, after a moment's silence, "I ought to go over to Sir Marcus and learn from him exactly how matters stand here."

"No, no; never mind him—at least, not this evening. Bores are bad enough in the morning, but after dinner, when one really wants to think well of their species, they are just intolerable; besides, I composed a little song while you were away, and I want you to hear it, and then you know we must have

some serious conversation about Sir Marcus; he is to be here to-morrow."

"I declare, Ju——"

"There, don't declare, but open the pianoforte, and light the candles; and as I mean to sing for an hour at least, you may have that cigar that you looked so lovingly at, and put back into the case. Ain't I good for you, as the French say?"

"Very good, too good for me," said he, kissing her, and now every trace of his sorrow was gone, and he looked as happy as might be.

END OF VOL. II.

London: Printed by SMITH, ELDER & Co., Old Bailey, E.C.

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